

# Teenage Pregnancy Awareness



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### **What is teen pregnancy?**

Teen pregnancy refers to the number of live births, fetal losses, stillbirths, and abortions per 1000 women/girls under the age of 20.

### **What factors contribute to teen pregnancy?**

Teen pregnancy in some communities arises from a lack of knowledge about and limited access to contraceptives. Complex societal issues are a significant driver as well. Examples of these societal risk factors include:

- Community disorganization.
- Alienation from school.
- Peer pressure.
- Issues with self-esteem, self-harm, and substance abuse.

### **What are the health risks associated with teen pregnancy?**

Being young is not a health risk. However, youth is often associated with lifestyle choices that raise the probability of harm. Adolescents are more likely to smoke during pregnancy (39% amongst teens vs. 12% amongst adults). They are also more likely to engage in substance abuse (12% amongst teens vs. 5% amongst adults). These choices lead to a higher rate of admission to the neonatal intensive care unit, preterm delivery, and congenital anomalies in the newborn [1].

### How prevalent is teen pregnancy?

Although overall teen pregnancy numbers are trending downward, communities in Northern Ontario still experience rates up to four times the provincial average. Thunder Bay reported 48 births per 1000 girls aged 15 to 19, according to the most recent statistics. Timmins-Cochrane was even higher at 64 births per 1000 [2].

### What do Thunder Bay's numbers tell us about the socioeconomic landscape?

They tell us that details matter. Thunder Bay has the same aggregate poverty level as the province (14% of households), but the story is different when one looks at subgroups. Indigenous Peoples make up 13% of Thunder Bay's population, yet account for 37% of households below the poverty line [3]. Poverty is both a cause and consequence of teen pregnancy.

### What else do we know about Thunder Bay?

We know that these same disparities exist in educational attainment. 53% of residents between the ages of 15 and 24, who identify as members of First Nations, do not have a high school diploma, equivalency certificate, or degree. That statistic is much lower (30%) amongst non-indigenous people [4]. Teen parents tend to emerge from neighborhoods with the lowest education levels [1], and those parents are more likely to raise teenagers who themselves become pregnant [5].

## **What happens to the children of teen parents?**

**Teen parent households frequently lack financial resources, stable employment, and community support. More generally, teen parents, almost by definition, lack parenting skills. This absence of structure, compounded with the effects of identity, is associated with alarming rates of entry into foster care and incarceration. The 2021 Census reports that 53.8% of children in foster care are Indigenous despite accounting for just 7.7% of the population aged 14 and under. The pipeline from housing insecurity to the Criminal Justice System is most pronounced in Northern Ontario where 75% to 90% of offenders are Indigenous [5].**

## **What steps can you take?**

**Peer pressure and messaging from the media can be overwhelming at times. It is important to remain grounded and remember that not everybody is “doing it.” Whether you are in a relationship, a “situationship,” or just have questions about your sexual health, you will find a helpful ear at the Multicultural Youth Centre. Please stop by!**

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[1] Fleming, N., Ng, N., Osborne, C., Biederman, S., Yasseen, A. S., 3rd, Dy, J., Rennicks White, R., & Walker, M. (2013). Adolescent pregnancy outcomes in the province of Ontario: a cohort study. *Journal of obstetrics and gynaecology Canada : JOGC = Journal d'obstetrique et gynecologie du Canada: JOGC*, 35 (3), 234-245.

[2] Etienne, N. (2011, November 23). *Teen pregnancy rates exceed provincial average*. MuskokaRegion.com.

[3] Dodaro, A., Wilkinson, A., & Schiff, R. (2022). Thunder Bay and the SDGs: A voluntary local review. Thunder Bay: Lakehead University.

[4] Statistics Canada. Table 98-10-0422-01 High school completion by Indigenous identity and labour force status: Canada, provinces and territories, census divisions and census subdivisions with a population 5,000 or more.

[5] The Regional Multicultural Youth Council (RMYC) Project Team. (January, 2024). *Lost, forgotten or still connected? Indigenous youths' perspectives on their education before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the way forward!* <https://www.diversitythunderbay.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/RMYC-VOICES-OF-YOUTH-2023-REPORT.pdf>