

Connecticut Women's Health Project:

Window of opportunity to improve sexual health



The Connecticut Women's Health Project (CWHP) at the Yale School of Public Health has conducted collaborative, community-based research among pregnant teens and young women and those at risk for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) since 1989. In partnership with community health centers, hospital clinics, public health departments, and other community organizations, the mission of CWHP is to serve women and their families through research that informs health care and health policy.

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Led by Yale School of Public Health professor Jeannette Ickovics, PhD and Jessica Lewis, LMFT, the Connecticut Women's Health Project (CWHP) has learned a lot about teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). What puts teens at risk for pregnancy also puts them at risk for STIs and HIV. CWHP conducted interviews and STI testing every 6 months for an 18-month period with 203 pregnant and 208 non-pregnant teens from urban health centers in New Haven, Hartford, Bridgeport, and Stamford. Here are some findings:

TEENS ENGAGE IN RISKY SEXUAL BEHAVIOR AND CONTRACT STI's

- Teens who were diagnosed with an STI did not change their behaviors or attitudes as a result of the diagnosis.
- Pregnant teens were 2 times more likely to have an STI one year after pregnancy than non-pregnant teens.
- Young teens age 14 to 16, those who started having sex at age 14 or younger, and those who used alcohol/drugs before sex were also at higher risk for STIs.

TEENS DO NOT SEE THEIR OWN RISK FOR SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS, HIV AND PREGANCY

- 81% who tested positive for STIs thought they had little or no chance of getting an STI.
- Only 30% of teens thought they were at risk for both pregnancy and STIs over the next year, even though 75% had sex within the past month.

Bottom Line

- Reproductive health services are needed before and after pregnancy—to enhance the physical health, mental health, and social well-being of young women and their children.
- Schools, churches, and communities must further educate young women about pregnancy, STI, HIV risks, and what young women can do to protect themselves.

CARE: Community Alliance for Research and Engagement is committed to improving health in New Haven. One goal is to share important research findings in our community so that they are easily accessible to all—to educate, inform, and spur action. Yale investigators thank the women, men and children of New Haven who participated in research projects designed to improve health. We value your participation and recognize that you are central to these efforts. We hope that you can use this information to prevent disease and promote good health in your family and in our community.