

Teen pregnancies on rise in Palm Beach County

By Lia Lehrer | South Florida Sun-Sentinel
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The Children's Services Council of [Palm Beach County](#) is to discuss today the results of a new report on birth statistics.

The rate of births to mothers 15-19 increased in 2006 for the first time since 1994 in [Palm Beach County](#), according to the latest Birth Outcomes Update report. The update, part of the agency's ongoing State of the Child in [Palm Beach County](#) report, details birth rates, access to prenatal care and birth weights by age, race and county.

With branches across the state — including Palm Beach, Broward, and [Miami-Dade](#) counties — Children's Services Council works to aid child growth in the areas of conception, birth and infancy; early care and education; and youth development. It also funds family support and child-abuse prevention programs.

This morning's panel will consist of professionals from several area health organizations, including [Palm Beach County](#) Health Department Assistant Director Alina Alonso, Health Care District CEO Dwight Chenette and March of Dimes South Florida chapter Director Hanna Fink.

"It's very important to hear from all of them," said Marlene Passell, Children Services Council spokeswoman. "Not one of us has enough resources or money to be able to do everything on our own."

The latest of the reports, released annually since 1991, shows data from 2006, Passell said. It shows the birth rate for every 1,000 girls, ages 15 to 19, increasing from 36.4 in 2005 to 37.7 in 2006. That number is lower than the state, at 43.5, but it is higher than Broward and Miami-Dade counties, at 34.1 and 36, respectively.

"It remains to be seen if the 2006 outcomes in teen births are the beginning of a negative trend or just a one-time deviation" from years of progress, the report states.

The council's research department works closely with the state Health Department to measure and obtain the data, which takes more than a year, Passell said.

The public needs to stay educated on birth outcome data and its implications, she said.

"The whole community needs to understand the importance of the impact of getting prenatal care and ensuring that children have access to quality child care," she said, "because the impact of not doing that affects all of us."

She cited school dropouts and teen delinquency as possible negative results of improper care for young children.

"We have to get people to make the connection between what happens in the first five years of life to what happens in the teenage years," Passell said.

Judy Klinek, director of supplemental educational services for the [Palm Beach County](#) School District, said children as young as elementary school should hear the facts in the report.

"They get most of their information from each other," Klinek said. "Some girls don't know this information or they aren't aware of how [they can] get pregnant."

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