

Editorial: A troubling increase in teen abortions

More information, not less, is needed to reduce abortions.

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After several years of declines, abortion rates are up in Minnesota, especially among teens.

Though the spike could just be a one-year aberration, it still highlights people's need for comprehensive birth-control information.

According to state Health Department figures, just over 14,000 pregnancies were terminated in 2006, about 5 percent more than the previous year. Among girls 17 and younger the increase was more dramatic, about 17 percent higher than in 2005.

Local anti-abortion advocates such as the Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life (MCCL) say they believe the increase was caused by aggressive promotion of abortion, citing the recent openings of several suburban Planned Parenthood offices, which make referrals for abortions.

But that view misrepresents the primary mission of Planned Parenthood and other pro-choice groups. None advertises abortion as the first, best or only approach to birth control. In fact, most of what they do involves pregnancy prevention; they want women to make their own well-informed decisions.

It seems more likely that abortion rates are up because of other factors -- including the rising cost of contraception and various efforts to restrict family planning information, such as abstinence-only curriculums.

During this year's legislative session, Gov. Tim Pawlenty blocked a moderate proposal that would have required schools to include in their health education curriculum information on contraceptives, while giving students who objected the right to opt out. The governor threatened to veto the entire education bill unless the sex-ed proposal was dropped.

Abstaining from sex is what many parents want for teens, and it definitively translates into no pregnancy.

But a recent report showed that abstinence-only curriculums don't work. And it is unrealistic to expect that all young people will abstain until marriage, another frequent parental goal -- not in a society where 95 percent of all people become sexually active before marriage. Comprehensive

WHAT WORKS

"When young women talk with their parents about sexuality and have good information and access to birth control, they are less likely to get pregnant. One of the best contraception methods, though, is hope and a vision for the future."

Brigid Riley, director, Minnesota Organization for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention and Parenting. For more information go to moappp.org.

sexual education for those students is necessary to keep the number of unwanted pregnancies low.

Another contributing factor is that funding for birth control programs has been cut for many health clinics. Young and low-income women who went to these clinics failed to receive information about contraceptives.

In addition, some community-based clinics that used to offer low-cost or free birth control pills have lost funding. It can come as no surprise that those women who cannot afford contraception are more likely to get pregnant.

The surprising rise of abortions is evidence that we must offer young women the tools they need to avoid unwanted pregnancies -- including information about delaying sex *and* about birth control. Together, those messages can help reduce abortion rates.