

# Adolescent Health in the San Joaquin Valley: *Individual and Neighborhood Factors in Merced County*

## Background and Implications

Promoting teen health, including assuring healthy pregnancies and births while reducing teen pregnancies, are key objectives for public health. Research indicates that early investment in initiatives that promote teen health improve the health and well-being of the overall community. This report examines current trends in teen birth and the cost associated with related health outcomes, and highlights programs supporting teen health in Merced County.

## Summary of Findings

Social determinants such as socioeconomic status and employment opportunity are negatively associated with teen births. Figure 1 illustrates that Merced County has a higher teen birth rate than the state. However, the county has reduced teen births at a rate similar to the state. A 33% decline in teen births (females ages 15-19) from 2009 to 2013 was found in Merced County. In 2009, the rate was 39/1,000 compared to a rate of 26/1,000 in 2013. The county saw a total of 2,435 teenage births between 2009 and 2013. Latinas account for 72% of teen births, but only compose 51% of the general population.

The prevention of teen pregnancy provides a cost benefit for youth and the community as a whole.

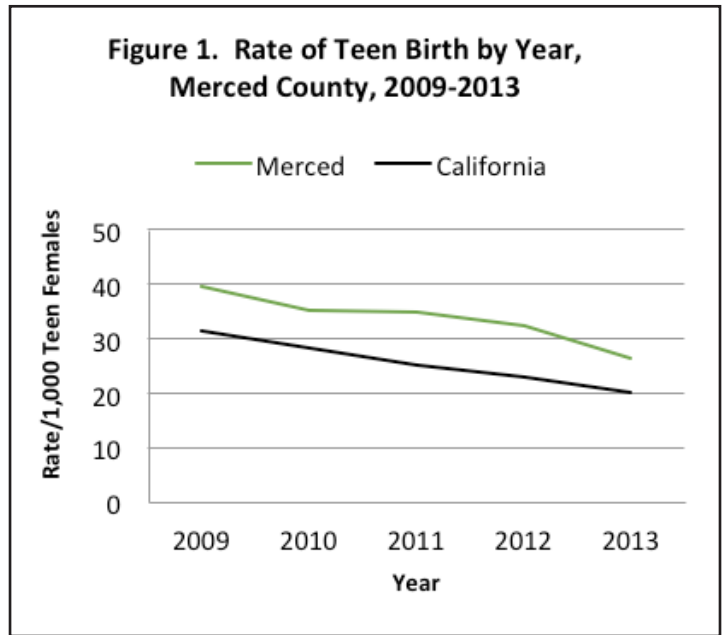


Table 1 shows conservative estimates of costs to taxpayers due to teen birth. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy estimates that the average cost of a teen birth is \$1,462. By reducing the rate of teen births, Merced County has saved 34% of the costs in 2013 compared to 2009.

**Table 1. Total Costs to Taxpayers Associated with Teen Childbearing by Year, Merced County**

Year	Rate <sup>a</sup> of Teen Births	Total Costs of Teen Childbearing <sup>b</sup>	% Decline in Teen Birth Rate Compared to Previous Year	Cumulative Savings Due to Decline Teen Birth Rate
2009	39	\$840,650	-	-
2010	35	\$744,158	10	\$96,492
2011	35	\$739,772	0	\$100,878
2012	32	\$687,140	9	\$153,510
2013	26	\$558,484	19	\$282,166

<sup>a</sup> rate per 1,000 live births

<sup>b</sup> based on average cost of teen birth in California \$1,462 (2010)

## How Does Public Health Reduce Teen Pregnancy and Related Health Outcomes?

Merced County Public Health Department offers programs and services that support pregnant and parenting teens, creates health-promoting resources for teens and their families and promotes policies and systems that build healthier communities.

### Nurse Family Partnership

Merced County's Nurse Family Partnership (NFP) program engages low-income first-time pregnant teens. Public Health Nurses partner with their clients to ensure that their babies are born healthy, their children achieve healthy growth and development, and the teen finishes school and becomes more economically self-sufficient. Through regular home visits, nurses provide information and education, as well as encouragement and support that enable participating teens to know how to protect their health and the health of their children. In 2015, NFP supported 86 clients and has the capacity to serve up to 100 clients throughout Merced County.

### Adolescent Family Life Program

The Adolescent Family Life Program (AFLP) works with teens that are pregnant and parenting. Social Workers promote positive youth development by focusing on the teen's strengths and resources. The program aims to help each teen: achieve health during and after pregnancy; ensure that her child is born healthy and grows and develops appropriately; complete her education and gain employable skills; and avoid repeat pregnancies. With an emphasis on helping teens be informed and responsible parents, AFLP aims to assist teenage families avoid repeat pregnancies and invest in the future for themselves and their child. In 2015, AFLP served 87 pregnant and parenting teens in Merced County.

**"While being in the program, I know that I could call my nurse whenever I had a question. Many times I was able to find answers to my questions."**

*Nurse Family Partnership Participant 2015.*

## What Other Public Health Services Support Adolescent Health Outcomes?

### Partnership to Improve Community Health

The Partnership to Improve Community Health (PICH) initiative works to create community policy, system and environmental changes that will increase health-promoting opportunities and improve the population's health. Strategies undertaken by the Public Health Department, and its community partners, that promote adolescent health are highlighted below:

### Decreasing Access to Tobacco Products

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, tobacco use is started and established primarily during adolescence. Nearly 9 out of 10 cigarette smokers first tried smoking by age 18. Flavorings in tobacco products can make them more appealing to youth and e-cigarettes are also popular and misunderstood as safe. In Merced County, the PICH initiative is working closely with the City of Merced to include language in the city's zoning ordinance that will prohibit new businesses that sell tobacco products from establishing within 1,000 feet of schools. In 2015, PICH recommended language was included in the draft Merced City Zoning Ordinance Update and is under review before adoption.

### Increasing Access to Healthy Behaviors

The prevalence of overweight and obesity among teens is on the rise and two factors are known to contribute to weight gain – regular consumption of sugar sweetened beverages and lack of physical activity. PICH is working to help schools in Merced County offer water as an alternative to sugar sweetened beverages during after-school programming. PICH is also working with schools to establish joint use agreements that make school grounds available after hours and on weekends for teens and their families to have safe places to play. In 2015, PICH worked with the Merced County Office of Education and Merced Union High School District to establish a water-promotion policy for all after-school program sites. PICH also supported the Winton School District's establishment of an open use policy for its elementary and middle school campuses that now host after-hour Zumba classes for residents and provide access to school grounds.

This report was produced by the California State University, Fresno, Central Valley Health Policy Institute in partnership with the San Joaquin Valley Public Health Consortium.  
The Merced County Department of Public Health is a member of the Consortium.