

Office of the Governor

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NEWS RELEASE

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Governor's Weekly Radio Message Addresses Teen Pregnancy Prevention

Gov. Christie Whitman provides a weekly radio message to radio stations throughout the state. Each week, the message focuses on a different concern or event of interest to New Jerseyans.

This week the Governor discusses teen pregnancy prevention efforts. May is Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Month.

The Governor discusses the importance of teaching teens personal responsibility. She also stresses how critical it is to make them understand the very serious consequences of their actions.

Earlier this week the Governor joined 100 teen mentors at a statewide youth forum sponsored by New Jersey's Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Initiative (APPI).

Governor Whitman launched the initiative last year, with nearly \$1 million in state grants, to help combat teen pregnancy in New Jersey. Administered through the New Jersey Department of Human Services, these grants are funding ten Youth-to-Youth projects, through which teens counsel their peers. They are also funding 11 Healthy Youth Development projects, through which adults serve as mentors to teens at risk of becoming pregnant.

Attached is a text of the message.

The radio message can be accessed by calling the Governor's actuality line at 609-292-3249. It will be available today beginning at noon, and will run through the weekend.

RADIO ADDRESS TEEN PREGNANCY PREVENTION

Hello, this is Governor Christie Whitman.

Since May is Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Month, I would like to take this opportunity to talk to you about helping our teens make responsible choices.

Across the country, too many children are having children of their own, well before they are ready to take on the responsibilities of parenthood.

We have to do more to help our young people understand the very serious consequences of their actions.

We need to send the message that the best option for young people is abstinence. However, if teens are going to be sexually active, we have to encourage them to take responsibility for their actions and to take precautions against pregnancy and disease.

In New Jersey, we are committed to teen pregnancy prevention. Through efforts such as our Healthy Youth Development and Youth to Youth programs, we are giving at risk teens mentors and family life education and helping them understand the full consequences of their actions.

While New Jersey's teen pregnancy rate is average for the nation, there is still more to do. A report by the Guttmacher Institute, tracking teen pregnancy rates between 1985 and 1996, found that the rate of teens becoming pregnant in New Jersey remained steady while the rate in other states saw some decline.

While many of the states that saw a decrease had rates much higher than New Jersey's to begin with, that doesn't mean that we can afford to be complacent.

What's more, this same study found that the percentage of pregnant 15 - 19 year olds who elected to have abortions was highest in New Jersey. Clearly, we have to do an even better job making sure our teens don't ever have to make these decisions in the first place.

Earlier this week, I attended a Youth Forum intended to help us do just that. The forum brought high school students who serve as peer mentors together with social service professionals to give us additional perspective on this issue.

I am eager to act on the valuable insights we gained so that we can bring down the teen pregnancy rate by bringing up the understanding, awareness, and responsibility of our young people.

There's no question that we have to be more effective in conveying a message of personal responsibility to our young people - that's what Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Month is all about.

Working together, we can help our teens make responsible choices.

Thank you, and have a great week.

