

AAP: Sex Ed About Abstinence and Contraception Most Effective

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Research now indicates that sexual education programs that encourage abstinence and offer information about birth control are the most effective at preventing teen pregnancy, according to a new report from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

The AAP report says that programs that discuss contraception don't increase sexual activity among kids. It also says that programs that emphasize abstinence as the safest and best approach, while also teaching about contraceptives, don't decrease contraceptive use.

"Current research indicates that encouraging abstinence and urging better use of contraception are compatible goals," the AAP says in its statement, which is based on a review of current research.

The findings are part of AAP's teen pregnancy policy statement, which has been recently updated to reflect new research on teen pregnancy trends and the effectiveness of sexual education programs. The new policy also urges pediatricians to encourage teens to postpone early sexual activity and encourage parents to educate their kids and teens about sexual development, responsible sexual behavior, decision-making, and values.

AAP policy statements are designed to keep pediatricians up to date on new research that may be helpful in treating patients.

Though teen pregnancy in the United States has steadily declined over the last 13 years, 900,000 teens still become pregnant each year. Many more teens are involved in sexual behavior that puts them at risk for becoming pregnant. The average age of first sexual intercourse is 17 for girls and 16 for boys, according to research from the Alan Guttmacher Institute, a nonprofit organization focused on sexual and reproductive health research. About 45% of high school girls and 48% of high school boys have had sex, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).