

## Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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Contact: Rebecca Burns, Health Officer  
517-279-9561, ext. 0148#

Kim Wilhelm, Prevention Services Dir.  
517-279-9561, ext. 0143#

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

#### National Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month!

**Coldwater, MI.** This year, the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency is celebrating National Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month, which occurs in May, by highlighting the health jurisdiction's dramatic decrease in teen birth rates. According to Rebecca Burns, Health Officer for the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency, "We've made enormous progress in reducing teen pregnancy."

During 2014, 150 teenage girls, between 15 to 19 years became pregnant and had babies. This is down from 270 teens 10 years ago (2004). Individual county comparisons are as follows:

County	Live Births to Teens	Live Births to Teens	2014 Birth Rates
	2004	2014	(per 1,000 women, 15 to 19 years)
Branch	74	39	30.6
Hillsdale	67	49	30.5
St. Joseph	129	62	32.5

While this data shows tremendous progress, there are still significant disparities in teen birth rates across geography. Birth rates for these rural counties remain 44% higher or more than the overall teen birth rate reported for Michigan (21.1 per 1,000 teens in 2014 – MDHHS, Division of Vital Records).

Teen pregnancy and childbearing bring substantial social and economic costs through immediate and long-term impacts on teen parents and their children:

- The *National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy & Unplanned Pregnancy* estimates that the taxpayer costs associated with these 150 children born to teen mothers in the tri-counties was over \$3 million dollars.
- Pregnancy and birth are significant contributors to high school dropout rates among girls. Only about 50% of teen mothers receive a high school diploma by 22 years of age, whereas approximately 90% of women who do not give birth during adolescence graduate from high school.

- The children of teenage mothers are more likely to have lower school achievement and to drop out of high school, have more health problems, be incarcerated at some time during adolescence, give birth as a teenager, and face unemployment as a young adult.

Ms. Burns adds, “Regardless of how your teen acts, parents continue to have more influence over their children and their decisions related to sex, more so than even their friends.” The health department offers the following tips to parents in talking with teens about relationships and pregnancy prevention:

- **Start talking** to your teen (and younger children) in age-appropriate ways about changes to expect during puberty; your expectations for dating; how to avoid teen pregnancy, STDs, and HIV/AIDS; and how to have healthy relationships.
- **Be clear and specific** about family values and rules about when it’s okay to start dating and your expectations around dating and sexual behavior. If you have strong beliefs and values around sex and marriage, communicate those plainly.
- **Believe in your power to affect change.** It might seem like your son or daughter is ignoring you, as if your adolescents don’t want to hear what you say, or that they don’t care what you think. Despite how they act, some of what you say will sink in. In survey after survey, children report that they want to talk to their parents about their sex-related questions, that it would be easier to delay sexual activity and avoid teen pregnancy if they were able to have more open, honest conversations about these topics with their parents, and that parents influence their decisions about sex more than friends do.
- **Be there: monitor and supervise.** Establish rules, curfews, and expectations for behavior through family conversations. Get to know your children’s friends and their families. Also, be sure to monitor what your children are reading, watching and listening to, and encourage your children to think about consequences from behaviors they may be exposed to in the media.
- **Discourage early dating.** Dating during adolescence is common and can be part of healthy development. However, serious and exclusive dating relationships can lead adolescents to have sex earlier than they would otherwise.
- **Ensure your child has regular visits with a medical provider.** Sometimes a young person will feel more comfortable asking a doctor or other medical professional specific questions about sex and reproductive health.
- **Talk about their future.** Young people who believe they have bright futures, options, and opportunities are much less likely to engage in risky sexual behavior. Encourage your children’s aspirations to high levels of achievement and to participate in school and community activities (such as clubs, sports or music, etc.). Support their activities and dreams to the extent you can.

To find more tips on how to improve your family's health, visit our website at [www.bhsj.org](http://www.bhsj.org).  
To find healthy eating tips and recipes, like us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/bhsjwic>.

**Branch County**  
570 N. Marshall Rd.  
Coldwater, MI 49036  
(517) 279-9561, ext. 0147#

**Hillsdale County**  
20 Care Drive  
Hillsdale, MI 49242  
(517) 437-7395, ext. 0307#

**Three Rivers**  
1110 Hill Street  
Three Rivers, MI 49093  
(269) 273-2161, 0205#

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