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EXPERTS CALL UNHEALTHY BEHAVIORS AMONG PREGNANT TEENS ‘HUGE’ PROBLEM

MotherToBaby Aims To Curb Trend Through New Partnership With ‘Healthy Teen Network’

BRENTWOOD, TN – Drug and alcohol abuse during pregnancy that leads to serious birth defects is something health care providers have often warned the general public about, but the message often struggles to reach pregnant teens – until now. [MotherToBaby](#), a service of the international non-profit Organization of Teratology Information Specialists (OTIS), announces a new initiative to reach this especially vulnerable population.

Many studies, including [one recently published](#) in the Spring 2015 issue of *Addictive Behaviors*, suggest substance abuse among pregnant teens is a notably disturbing problem, one that often continues even after they find out they’re pregnant. “Illicit substances, alcohol, these are all exposures that can do irreversible damage to a developing baby,” said Kenneth Lyons Jones, MD, MotherToBaby past president and one of two doctors who first identified Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) in 1973. “Evidently, pregnant teens are particularly vulnerable when it comes to unhealthy behaviors. It’s a huge problem that can only be solved by connecting them with the support they need in order to make healthier decisions,” he added.

In an effort to reach more pregnant and breastfeeding teens, MotherToBaby has partnered with the [Healthy Teen Network](#) to provide evidence-based information about exposures, such as drugs and alcohol, during pregnancy through its 866-626-6847 help-line. The Healthy Teen Network is a national non-profit that promotes better outcomes for adolescents and young adults by advancing social change, cultivating innovation, and strengthening youth-supporting professionals and organizations.

“To improve outcomes, including reducing teen pregnancies and births, we need to recognize the complex interrelated factors, or social determinants—such as access to quality education and health services, life goals and aspirations for the future, or healthy relationships—that influence health outcomes,” explained Gina Desidario, director of Marketing and Communications for the Healthy Teen Network.

Dr. Jones hopes by encouraging more youth-centered organizations to educate pregnant teens about MotherToBaby’s judgment-free, evidence-based counseling service, many birth defects will be prevented. Desidario says it’s a service pregnant teens need. “All adolescents and young adults, including teen parents, have a right to comprehensive, developmentally and culturally appropriate, confidential support and services, including contraceptive services, and if pregnant, to full options counseling and services,” she said.

This year, as part of May's National Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month, Healthy Teen Network is highlighting a holistic [Youth 360°](#) frame as a way to positively, inclusively promote adolescent health for all young people. It's launched a series of activities and resources to promote adolescent health and well-being. See the Healthy Teen Network [website](#) for more information: www.HealthyTeenNetwork.org.

MotherToBaby, which consists of 14 services housed at universities and hospitals across the country, provides FREE, evidence-based, personalized risk assessments, education and counseling regarding the effects of exposures like prescription and over-the-counter drugs, alcohol, smoking, illicit substances, vaccines, beauty products, herbal supplements, chemicals and more during pregnancy and while breastfeeding. The public can be connected with a bilingual (English/Spanish) MotherToBaby expert by calling toll-free 1-866-626-6847. The MotherToBaby [website](#) also houses a library of fact sheets located at www.MotherToBaby.org.

More than 100,000 women and their health care providers seek information about birth defect prevention from MotherToBaby every year. MotherToBaby has been able to launch new outreach efforts to reach vulnerable populations through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Human Resources and Services Administration.

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