HOT TOPICS

**Improving Childhood Asthma Outcomes**

Almost everyone knows a child with asthma. In the United States, an estimated 5 million children suffer from this disease, and the number of asthma cases is increasing rapidly. **RAND Health** assembled an interdisciplinary committee of nationally recognized experts and leaders in childhood asthma. Their mandate: to develop specific policy recommendations to help improve childhood asthma outcomes in the United States. This summary offers 11 policy recommendations for meeting these goals, which fall into two broad areas: Improve health care delivery and financing and strengthen the public health infrastructure.

**READ MORE:** How to Improve Childhood Asthma Outcomes

**Understanding the Sexual Behavior of Adolescents**

Public health officials and educators have a long-standing interest in adolescent sexual behavior and risk prevention—an interest intensified by the spread of HIV. Unfortunately, understanding of adolescent sexuality is quite limited. As part of an ongoing program of research on risk behavior, **RAND** examined the range of adolescent sexual activity. Researchers also looked at how a condom availability program affected adolescents’ attitudes and behavior.

**READ MORE:** Understanding the Sexual Behavior of Adolescents

**Does Early Smoking Signal Later Problems?**

The observation that adolescents who smoke also tend to have a variety of other problems (including the use of alcohol and other drugs, academic difficulties, delinquency, and impaired relationships) is not new. But a recent series of studies by **RAND** has extended those observations to examine the long-term social consequences of smoking in early adolescence. The researchers found that even occasional smoking during the middle school years may contribute to later problems, including dropping out of high school.

**READ MORE:** Does Early Smoking Signal Later Problems?

**Mental Health Care for Youth**

Efforts to improve mental health care for children and adolescents are under way and include parity laws for private insurance and the reorganization of public services. (Parity laws mandate equal coverage for mental health and physical health care.) At the policy level, however, many of these efforts are hindered by the lack of an up-to-date, comprehensive national picture of which troubled children are getting care, how much it costs to provide it, who pays for that care, and how resources are being used.

**UPCOMING REPORTS**

**Effects of Alcohol Advertising on Underage Drinking**

This study is examining causal links between alcohol advertising and underage drinking. Results are due out late fall 2002.

➤ To find out more about **RAND Health**, visit its Web site at [www.rand.org/health](http://www.rand.org/health)

➤ For more on issues related to Child Policy and Health go to [http://www.rand.org/child/bib/4.html](http://www.rand.org/child/bib/4.html)

For monthly email updates on all new **RAND** child policy publications and research projects, sign up for the Child Policy Project mailing list at [www.rand.org/child](http://www.rand.org/child).