

Associated Press

Calif. counties get mail-order condom program

February 18, 2012

Associated Press - February 18, 2012

Bakersfield, Calif. (AP) - Teenagers in several counties can get condoms in the mail for free under a program launched this week and supported by state public health officials.

The Condom Access Project allows youth between the ages of 12 and 19 to order a package of 10 condoms, lube and health brochures online at TeenSource.org, a website run by the nonprofit California Family Health Council. The package will be mailed to them in a nondescript yellow envelope.

Supporters say the program -- aimed at reducing pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases among teens -- will benefit young people who cannot afford to buy condoms or are too embarrassed to go to clinics where they are distributed for free.

"We can't keep our heads in the sand and pretend there isn't a problem....," Vice President of Public Affairs for the Family Health Council Amy Moy told the Bakersfield Californian (<http://bit.ly/xKc2K1>).

"We want to make sure (teens are) as safe as possible." Kern County has among the highest teenage birth rates in the state, according to county health officials.

Critics say the program could be perceived as tacit approval of teenage sex and may not go over well with parents.

"I would think the overwhelming majority of parents in Kern County wouldn't think this is a good idea," said Linda Davis, executive director of the Bakersfield Pregnancy Center, which emphasizes abstinence. "And I don't think their kids would have the nerve to request them." The California Family Health Council countered by citing studies it says have shown that access to birth control does not encourage teenagers to have sex.

The condom program is supported by the California Department of Public Health's STD Control Branch. It is available in Kern, Alameda, Sacramento and San Joaquin counties and parts of San Francisco.

Teens will be limited to one package of condoms per month.

"It'd be best if teens didn't have sex, but if they're going to do it anyway, they need to protect themselves," said Denis Smith, director of disease control for the Kern County Department of Public Health, which is not involved with the project. "As a public health department, we have an obligation to provide education and tools." ____ Information from: The Bakersfield Californian, www.bakersfield.com

[See the topic on aegis.org](http://aegis.org)