

Virtual babies don't discourage teenagers from wanting real ones



By [Jon Cohen](#) Aug. 25, 2016 , 3:00 PM

Here's one way *not* to prevent a young girl from getting pregnant: Ask her to care for a virtual baby. New research finds that teenagers given lifelike baby dolls (pictured) as part of a program to dissuade them from wanting a real baby became pregnant at a higher rate than peers in a control group. The study followed 3000 Australian girls who enrolled when they were between 13 and 15 years old and were followed until they turned 20. Only half the group received the intervention, which encourages girls to think twice about becoming pregnant because babies have intensive, constant needs that can compromise a teenager's lifestyle and goals. The centerpiece of the program—variations of which are popular in many developed countries—is a weekend with an "infant simulator" that cries and must be "fed, burped, rocked, and have its nappy changed." According to a paper published today in *The Lancet*, **17% of the girls who received the intervention became pregnant by age 20 versus 11% in the control group.** (Abortions were high in both groups, and averaged 57%.)

DOI: 10.1126/science.aah7231

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