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## **STUDY CAUTIONS PARENTS OF MATURE TEEN GIRLS**

*Girls who have early puberty and have older boyfriends at high risk for drugs, sex and alcohol*

Teenage girls who are more mature than their peers and who also have an older romantic partner are at an increased risk for substance use, engaging in sexual intercourse, and combination of sex and drug use, according to a study published in the March issue of *Prevention Science*, a peer reviewed publication of the Society for Prevention Research (SPR).

“Parents of all teenagers have a responsibility for talking to their children and guiding them through romantic relationships and the risks of drug use. But this study shows that parents of girls who reach puberty ahead of their peers and who have an older boyfriend should take a special interest,” according to Carolyn Tucker Halpern, Ph.D., of the University of North Carolina, who conducted the study.

The study was based on a nationally representative sample of 4,000 adolescents who participated in the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. The students were between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades in 1994 and have been tracked since then through follow-up surveys.

“Adolescent girls and boys are at risk for experimenting with sex, alcohol and drugs. Those who mature early are known to be at higher risk for these problems. But within that group, girls who have an older boy friend, appear to be at an extra risk for multiple high-risk behaviors, such as intravenous drug use, marijuana use and sexual intercourse,” Halpern said.

A similar conclusion could not be drawn for boys who reached puberty ahead of their peers and had older girl friends, because there were very few of them in the study sample. However, the presence of a romantic partner of the same or younger age was also associated with elevated risk for drug use and sexual risk taking for both boys and girls.

Halpern’s study was supported by a grant from the National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA) of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) of the federal government.