



US Teen Pregnancy Rates Plummet

U.S. teen pregnancy rates have fallen nearly 50 percent among Hispanic and black teens, and the overall teen birth rate has dropped more than 40 percent in the past 10 years.

The new figures from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention represent “one of the nation’s great success stories of the past two decades,” said Bill Albert, spokesman for the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. He told VOA the historic declines in teen pregnancy are “extraordinary.”

But the CDC’s director, Dr. Tom Frieden, said that while the numbers suggest great progress, “the reality is [that] too many American teens are still having babies.”

According to the most recent numbers from 2014, nearly 250,000 babies were born to females ages 15 through 19, for a birth rate averaging 24 births per 1,000 young women.

Albert said that is roughly four times the number in Great Britain and seven times the number in Japan.

Progress isn’t victory

The CDC said a lot of the credit for the drop goes to programs created at the state and local level, and their ability to address specific problems inside individual communities.

“These data underscore that the solution to our nation’s teen pregnancy problem is not going to be a one-size-fits-all kind of program”, said the CDC’s Lisa Romero, a reproductive health scientist.

Starting in 2010, the CDC, in cooperation with the Office of Adolescent Health, began showcasing the effectiveness of “innovative, multicomponent, community-wide initiatives” in reducing pregnancy rates.

They found in communities where new programs were introduced, the number of teens receiving good information, health services and contraception rose over time.

These kinds of local outreach strategies are now being implemented across the United States.

But the CDC’s Dr. Lee Warner told VOA that teen birth rates remain the highest in areas where “unemployment and lower income and education are more common.”

Why the drop?

The CDC also said societal changes are having a big impact. Warner told VOA that more teens are delaying sex and that those having sex are using more effective contraceptives more frequently.

Albert also pointed to the unintended consequences of popular reality television shows such as “16 and Pregnant” and “Teen Mom,” which he said have served as cautionary tales.

Shows like these, he said, “make the risks and realities and challenges seem more real to them.”

Ultimately, Albert and the CDC said the key to keeping the rates of teen pregnancy down is giving teens “good quality information” along with access to contraception.