

THINK PROGRESS

Teen Birthrate Plunges to Historic Low

The teen birthrate hit an all-time low in 2015, according to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) study, and officials say increased access to birth control may be to thank.

With a rate of 22.3 live births per 1,000 teenage girls aged 15 to 19, last year's data shows a 64 percent decrease from 1991, when the country's teen birthrate was at its highest. For girls between the ages of 10-14, this number has dropped nearly 90 percent since 1991. CDC researchers called these declines "absolutely astounding."

This doesn't mean that teenagers are having less sex, according to other reproductive health experts. Isaac Maddow-Zimet, a researcher with the Guttmacher Institute, told STAT that sexual activity among teens hasn't changed much over the past decade. Instead, a steady increase in contraceptive use kept sexually active teens from becoming parents.

A shift in national policy has helped break historic barriers to teens' access to contraception. A total of 28 states now have laws that require health insurers to cover the full price of a range birth control drugs and devices. And 21 of those states allow minors to obtain these drugs without notifying their parents. Some, like Maryland, have pushed even further to demand insurers offer more than a year's supply of contraception at a time and cover the cost of a vasectomy.

"This nation has made remarkable, off-the-chart success on a pressing social issue that many of us considered unsolvable," Bill Albert, a representative from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, told Reuters.