



Is Baby Recession Over? US Births Up After Years of Decline

NEW YORK (AP) - It appears the baby recession really is over: Preliminary figures show U.S. births were up last year for the first time in seven years.

About 53,000 more babies were born in 2014 than the year before - a 1 percent increase. Births were up for nearly every racial and ethnic group, and there were improvements in several other key measures. Teen births hit another historic low and there were fewer cesarean sections and preterm deliveries.

“It looks like perhaps we’re seeing the turnaround that many experts have been anticipating,” said Gretchen Livingston, a birth trends expert at Pew Research Center. She was not involved in the report.

The nation has been in a baby recession since 2007 - a decline in births that experts have blamed mainly on the nation’s economy. It looked like it might have ended in 2013, with preliminary figures showing the number of births rising slightly.

But the final tally showed yet another decline.

Government statisticians said they’ve taken extra steps to make sure the preliminary 2014 numbers hold up. Still, some experts are cautious about declaring a lasting upswing.

“I’ve learned not to prognosticate,” said Brady Hamilton of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. He’s lead author of the new report, which is based on a review of nearly all birth certificates.

Highlights from the 2014 report released Wednesday:

-There were just under 4 million babies born. Births rose for white, black, Asian and Hispanic women. For some unknown reason, it fell for Native American moms.

- The birth rate for women of child-bearing age rose 1 percent, to just under 63 births per 1,000 women. In 2013, the rate was 62.5 percent - the lowest it had ever been.

-The total fertility rate rose slightly, by less than 1 percent. That tells how many children a woman can be expected to have if current birth rates continue. The figure was just shy of 1.9 children last year. Experts say 2.1 is a goal if you want to keep the population at its current size.

-About 32 percent of babies were delivered through cesarean section, marking the second straight decline. In the 1980s, health officials set a goal of 15 percent, believing that many C-sections are done out of convenience or unwarranted caution.

-The preterm birth rate - delivery at less than 37 weeks - fell to a little under 10 percent, as part of a continuing decline.

-The birth rates women in their 30s and early 40s continued to rise. The rate for women in their late 20s - who have the most babies - held steady after years of decline.

-The teen birth rate fell 9 percent, continuing a decline that started in 1991. The number of babies born to teens last year - about 249,000 - is less than half the peak of nearly 645,000 in 1970.

Some experts had expected to see that decline level off at some point.

“What we have seen is quite remarkable,” said Bill Albert of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy.

Experts attribute the decline to a range of factors, including less sex and more use of contraception. Related to that, apparently, is a change in social norms for many teens, Albert said. They are more wary of pregnancy, and less likely to know someone who became pregnant as a teen or even to know someone who is the daughter of a teen mother, he suggested.