

# THINK PROGRESS

## As More Young Americans Are Using Birth Control, Teen Births Have Hit a New Record Low

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The U.S. teen birth rate has hit its lowest point in the entire 73 years that the government has been collecting the data, according to a new report from the National Center for Health Statistics. Researchers say that's partly because more youth are now opting to use effective forms of birth control.

In 2012, there were 29.4 births for every thousand Americans teens between the ages of 15 and 19. That represents a six percent drop from the year before — and fits into a larger pattern of declining teen births across the country. The teen birth rate has been steadily falling since 1991. At this point, there are less than half the number of children born to teenage mothers than there were in 1970, when the teen birth rate hit its peak.

Dr. John Santelli, a professor of population and family health at Columbia University who was not connected to the government study, told NBC News that the 2012 figures represent “a considerable one year drop.”

But Santelli also noted that isn't because there's been much change in teenagers' sexual activity over the past decade. There aren't fewer adolescents having sex, and there aren't an increased number of abortions being performed.

“What we have seen is greater availability of much more effective birth control methods,” Santelli explained. Particularly as more medical professionals

have been recommending long-lasting forms of contraception to their teenage patients, Santelli believes more adolescents have been able to take effective steps to avoid pregnancy.

“This stunning turnaround in teen birth represents one of the nation's great success stories of the past two decades,” Bill Albert, the chief program officer at the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, told U.S. News & World Report. “This report shows that significant progress can and has been made on a very challenging social problem that many once considered both unsolvable and inevitable.”

Although the national teen birth rate continues to set new record lows, there are still significant regional disparities within the United States. States in the South, which tend to lack adequate sexual health instruction in public schools, still have stubbornly high teen birth rates. While some states are slowly moving away from abstinence-only education in order to attempt to change that, conservatives still tend to resist efforts to expand sexual health resources for teens.

Ultimately, though, teaching youth about birth control isn't a controversial policy. The vast majority of Americans support expanding comprehensive sex ed — particularly after they see the direct results. In California, for example, teen births plunged by 60 percent after the state invested more resources in sexual health education.