



Teen births, prematurity, C-sections down, CDC reports

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Rates of teen births, premature deliveries and cesarean deliveries all are down, a new report says.

"This is a positive picture," says Jennifer Howse, president of the March of Dimes, which focuses on maternal and infant health. "Things are definitely heading in the right direction."

Overall birth rates also fell in 2010 for the third year in a row, says the report, released Thursday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It cites several trends:

► **Premature birth rates**, up steadily for three decades, have fallen for the past four years, from a high of 12.8% in 2006 to 12.0% in 2010. The USA's rate remains among the highest in the developed world, Howse says, and explains why the

country's infant mortality rate is also among the highest of any industrialized nation.

Some of the decline in prematurity could be due to new therapies. Treating high-risk women with hormones can help prevent premature delivery, says Amy Murtha, a maternal-fetal medicine specialist at the Duke University Medical Center. Hospitals also may be limiting "elective" C-sections; Murtha notes that most of the drop in prema-

ture deliveries was in babies born only a few weeks early.

► **Teen birth rates** fell three years in a row, decreasing 9% from 2009 to 2010, to the lowest rate in nearly 70 years. That "is truly extraordinary progress on an issue that people once considered intractable," says Bill Albert, a spokesman for the Washington-based non-profit National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy.

Albert credits the decline to

less sex and more contraception, rather than a greater use of abortion. Doctors also are doing a better job with postpartum contraception, offering teen mothers long-term birth-control methods, such as hormonal implants or IUDs, to help avoid a second unintended pregnancy, says Erika Werner, a maternal-fetal medicine physician and an assistant professor in gynecology and obstetrics at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine.

► **The rate of C-sections** fell for the first time in a decade. The slight decline — from 32.9% of deliveries in 2009 to 32.8% in 2010 — followed several years in which the growth of C-sections had slowed, suggesting the number of procedures is at least leveling off, if not falling, Werner says. C-sections often go hand-in-hand with premature births, because about 45% of premature babies are delivered by cesarean section.