



Birthrate for U.S. teens lowest in history

Teen births are at their lowest level in almost 70 years, federal data report today. Birthrates for ages 15-19 in all racial and ethnic groups are lower than ever reported.

“Young people are being more careful,” says Sarah Brown, CEO of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. She attributes the declines to less sex and increased use of contraception.

The report by the National Center for Health Statistics says the actual number of teen births in 2010 was the lowest since 1946. It credits “strong pregnancy prevention messages” and says contraceptive use “may have contributed.”

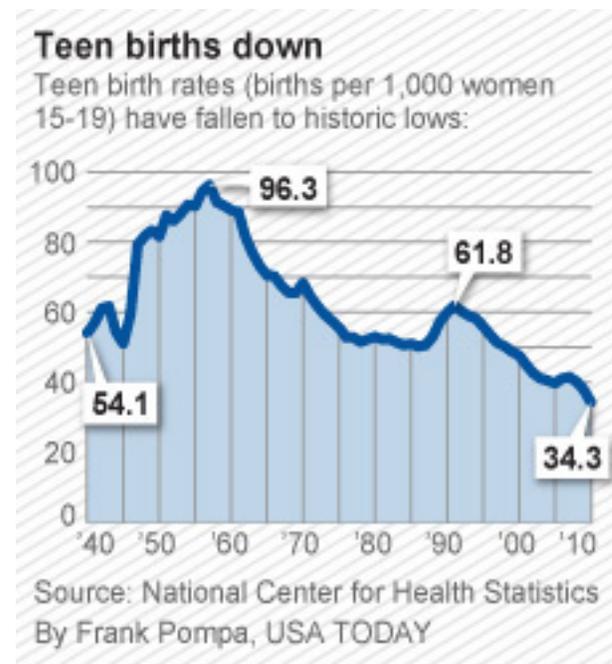
The analysis comes at a time when contraception is a hot political debate, from a congressional investigation of whether federal money pays for abortions to concern among some church leaders over an Obama administration mandate that all health insurance cover birth control.

The new numbers elaborate on federal data released in November that found the teen birthrate dropped 9% from 2009 to 2010, to a historic low of 34.3 births per 1,000 teens. That’s down 44% from 61.8 in 1991. The all-time high was 96.3 during the Baby Boom year of 1957.

The new analysis, based on 2010 preliminary data, shows a range in birthrates among racial and ethnic groups, from 10.9 for Asians to 23.5 for whites, 51.5 for blacks and 55.7 for Hispanics.

“The fact that states with high Hispanic populations still show declines speaks to the more general pattern of increasing contraceptive use and declining teen births,” says Laura Lindberg, a senior research associate with the non-profit Guttmacher Institute in New York.

Contraceptive use the first time a girl has sex “has gone up dramatically,” she says, noting that the elimination of pelvic exams before receiving prescriptions for hormonal methods, as well as use of long-acting methods such as IUDs, suggest teens are taking contraception seriously.



That December report also noted a decline in the percentage of teenage girls “who said they wanted to get pregnant. It’s a very small percent, but I do think it speaks to an underlying shift in attitudes,” Lindberg says. Her analysis also found that those who had ever used the “morning-after” emergency contraception (12%-15%) didn’t change from 2006-08 to 2008-10.

Lindberg says Guttmacher’s latest data on abortions are from 2006, but the “general pattern over time has been declining abortion rates paralleling declining pregnancy and birth” rates.

Brown says a variety of societal and cultural factors may play a role in teens’ behavior shifts, as diverse as the recession and reality TV shows on teen mothers. But all seem to lead teens to the message “postpone your families until you’re through school and a little more grown up.”