

Teen Birth Rate Falls to Another Historic Low

By Sharon Jayson, USA Today

Teen births are at the lowest ever reported in the USA and both the number of births and birth rate dropped 10% in just one year, according to fresh federal data released today.

The number of births to teens ages 15-19 in 2013 was 274,641, which the National Center for Health Statistics says is the lowest since it started tracking such data from all states in 1933. That number is far fewer than in 1970, which was the all-time peak year with 644,708 teen births.

The 10% drop in the teen birth rate – to 26.6 births per 1,000 from 29.4 births per 1,000 in 2012 -- marked another historic low.

“A drop of 10% in a single year is quite dramatic,” says senior demographer Carl Haub of the nonprofit Population Reference Bureau.

Bill Albert, chief program officer at the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, says the reduction in teen births “has gone from extraordinary to almost unbelievable.”

“The historic decline has been driven by the magic formula of less sex and more contraception,” says Albert, who notes that his organization added “And Unplanned Pregnancy” to its name in 2007 to broaden its reach to young adult singles after “teen pregnancy was plummeting.”

Despite the drastic drops in U.S. teen birth rates, Haub notes that the new low of 26.6 is 5.5 times higher than in Western Europe, where rates are in single digits. The most recent United Nations data shows Switzerland at a low of 1.9 and Luxembourg at a high of 8.3, with most others in the area at 5 or 6 per 1,000 teens.

The U.S. data, based directly on birth certificates, also reflects declines in birth rates for all ages except those in their 30s and 40s. Those increased slightly in 2013.

Although the preliminary number of 2013 births overall in the USA was 3,957,577, just 4,736 more than in 2012, Hamilton says the final data for the year could well be flat.

The report notes that from 2007 through 2010, the number of births declined steadily, but the pace of decline slowed from 2010 to 2012.

“This screams recession,” Haub says, noting that the slowdown in the pace suggests “some kind of recovery on the horizon” and a potential rise ahead in the numbers and rates.

Among other preliminary findings:

- The birth rate for women ages 20-24 hit a record low of 81.2 births per 1,000 women; since 2007 the rate for that age has declined at nearly 4% a year.
- The rate for unmarried women dropped 1% from 2012 to 2013 to 44.8 births per 1,000 unmarried women ages 15-44.