

Teen births hit historic low, half of 1991

Teen births have continued to drop, reaching a historic low in 2012 and hitting half of what they were in 1991, says a government report out Friday.

The birthrate for teens, ages 15 to 19, dropped 6% from 31.3 births per 1,000 teen girls in 2011 to 29.4 in 2012. Teen birthrates were down for all racial and ethnic groups.

This is the lowest teen birthrate since 1940 when data on teen births started being collected, says lead author Brady Hamilton, a statistician with the National Center for Health Statistics, part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It's less than half of what it was in 1991, the recent peak of teen births (61.8 births per 1,000 teen girls), he says.

"This is a truly remarkable success on a pressing social issue that many once considered intractable," says Bill Albert, a spokesman for the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy.

Why have the rates continued to go down?

"It really is this magic formula of less sex and more contraception that has driven the rates down," Albert says. "More kids are delaying sex, which is a good and responsible thing to do, and the kids who are having sex are using contraception more consistently and carefully, also a good and responsible thing to do."

Teen birthrates varied by race and origin with 46.3 births per 1,000 Hispanic teens, 15 to 19; 43.9 per 1,000 for black teens; 34.9 for American Indian or Alaska Native; 20.5 for whites; 9.7, for Asian or Pacific Islanders.

"I applaud the efforts of those working hard to educate and support family planning, delaying sex and effective contraception in adolescents," says pediatrician

Cora Collette Breuner, a spokeswoman for the American Academy of Pediatrics and professor of adolescent medicine at Seattle Children's Hospital. "But we are not done. We still have almost three-quarters of a million teen pregnancies per year in the United States with over 300,000 births. Let's keep educating and supporting our kids."

The new report, based on preliminary data from 2012, shows:

- Overall, the number of births in the USA was almost 4 million in 2012, essentially the same as 2011.
- The general fertility rate was 63 births per 1,000 women, ages 15-44, down slightly from 63.2 in 2011.
- The birthrate for women in their early 20s (20-24) declined to a record low of 83.1 births per 1,000 women in 2012, down 3% from 2011. Birthrates for women in their late 30s and early 40s rose slightly.
- The C-section rate remained unchanged in 2012 at 32.8%.

Here's a breakdown of how birthrates for teens have dropped over time:

- 1991: 61.8 births per 1,000 teen girls, ages 15 to 19.
- 2007: 41.5 births per 1,000 teens
- 2010: 34.2 births per 1,000 teens
- 2011: 31.3 births per 1,000 teens
- 2012: 29.4 births per 1,000 teens

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention