



Teenage Birth Rate Reached Record Low in 2012

Over the last several decades, the number of teenagers having babies has steadily declined, and reached a record low in 2012, according to new data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In a report on preliminary birth data for the United States in 2012, the CDC found that while the overall birth rate and number of births nationwide remained essentially unchanged, birth rates significantly declined for women between the ages of 15 and 29.

Since 2011, the birth rate for teenagers between 15 and 19 declined by 6 percent, and the number of births to teenagers dropped to a historic low of 305,420 – that's the lowest since the end of World War II, and less than half the total in 1970, when the number of teen births reached its peak (644,708).

The CDC report showed that the birth rate for women in their early 20s has also been steadily declining since 2007, usually by 5 percent each year, and reached a record low of 83.1 births per 1,000 women in 2012. Meanwhile, the birth rates for women in their 30s and early 40s increased.

And among women of all ages, both the birth rate and the number of births appear to have declined slightly, but not at a statistically significant rate, since 2011. The preliminary number of births for the entire United States dropped from 3,953,590 in 2011 to 3,952,937 in 2012 and the birth rate dropped from 63.2 to 63 births per 1,000 women.

Bill Albert, chief program officer at the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, says the decline in the teen birth rate could be a sign that teenagers are having less sex, that they are using contraception more often, or a combination of the two.

“This stunning turnaround in teen birth represents one of the nation's great success stories of the past two decades,” Albert says. “I think the general belief is that teen pregnancy is too difficult a problem and that there's nothing that can be done. But 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 teen birth rate has been cut in half since the early 1990s, the CDC's National Center on Health Statistics found in a report released Thursday that the median age at which women first have sex has decreased since 1988, from 17.8 years to 17.1 years.

“This drop means that women may spend a significantly larger part of their reproductive years at risk of an unintended pregnancy,” the report says.

Despite the fact that the United States has made large strides in reducing the number of teen births, the teen birth rate is still far higher than other industrialized countries, Albert says.

In 2009, the teen birth rate for women between the ages of 15 and 19 was 37.9 births per 1,000 women. By comparison, that rate was nearly 10 times higher than the rate in Switzerland, which was 4.1 births per 1,000 women in 2009. In that year, the United States had a higher teen birth rate than 16 other countries, including Japan, the Netherlands, Germany, Greece, Spain and Australia.

“The U.S. has made remarkable progress, obviously,” Albert says. “But we are an outlier, even taking into account these impressive declines. There's no doubt about it.”