

Teenage Birthrates Reach New Low

The birthrate for US teenagers has reached an unprecedented low, according to a new report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.¹ The teenage birthrate has declined steadily since the late 1950s, except for a steep increase seen from the late 1980s until 1991. At 48.7 births per 1,000 women ages 15 through 19 years, the 2000 birthrate is about half of the peak level (96.3 births per 1,000) attained in 1957 and 22% lower than the 1991 rate (62.1 births per 1,000).

The number of births to teenagers also dropped in 2000, to 479,067—the fewest since 1987. The number of births has fallen because the drop in the birthrate since 1991 has been large enough to offset the recent surge in the population of female teenagers, from 8.3 million in 1992 to 9.7 million in 2000. If the birthrate had remained at the 1991 level throughout the decade, an additional 546,000 infants would have been born to teenagers. The impact on the health care system would have been substantial because babies born to teenagers, compared with babies born to older mothers, are more likely to be preterm and to have a low birth weight and thus to be at greater risk of serious and long-term illness, developmental delay, and death during their first year of life.

Although the teenage birthrate in the United States is decreasing, it is still higher than the rates in other developed countries. However, what makes the recent decline so encouraging is that all population groups have shared in it. During the 1990s, the birthrate for teenagers in all age-groups fell (Table 1). Among

women ages 15 through 17 years, the birthrate reached a record low, dropping to 27.5 births per 1,000 in 2000, and the rate in younger girls—0.9 births per 1,000 in both 1999 and 2000—was at the lowest level in 30 years. Among older teens (ages 18 or 19 years), the birthrate dropped to 79.5 births per 1,000 in 2000, but the number of births that year rose slightly, reflecting the growth of the female population for this age-group.

Table 1. Teenage birthrates and number of births

Year	Birthrate (per 1,000)			Number of births		
	10 – 14 y	15 – 17 y	18 – 19 y	10 – 14 y	15 – 17 y	18 – 19 y
1991	1.4	38.7	94.4	12,014	188,226	331,351
1992	1.4	37.8	94.5	12,220	187,549	317,866
1993	1.4	37.8	92.1	12,554	190,535	310,558
1994	1.4	37.6	91.5	12,901	195,169	310,319
1995	1.3	36.0	89.1	11,242	192,508	307,365
1996	1.2	33.8	86.0	11,148	185,721	305,856
1997	1.1	32.1	83.6	10,121	180,154	303,066
1998	1.0	30.4	82.0	9,462	173,231	311,664
1999	0.9	28.7	80.3	9,054	163,588	312,462
2000	0.9	27.5	79.5	8,561	157,661	312,845

Adapted from Ventura et al. National Vital Statistics Reports. 2001.¹

Teenage birthrates also declined across all racial and ethnic groups. The steepest rate decline—a 31% decrease—was seen among black teenagers. However, the 2000 birthrates among black teens (79.2 per 1,000) and Hispanic teens (94.4 per 1,000) were markedly higher than the rates for other groups. The lowest rate occurred among Asian or Pacific Islander teenagers: 21.8 births per 1,000 women ages 15 through 19 years. 🌐

REFERENCE

1. Ventura SJ, Mathews TJ, Hamilton BE. *Births to Teenagers in the United States, 1940-2000*. National Vital Statistics Reports, Vol 49. No. 10. Hyattsville, Md: National Center for Health Statistics; 2001.