

Teen Births Decline, Unmarried Childbearing Stabilizes

Teen births are down nationwide and unmarried childbearing has leveled off, according to a new report from the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). The report also includes important new findings on maternal and infant health.

Although the 1993 teen birth rate is still higher than 20 years ago, the birth rate for those ages 15–19 declined four percent from 1991 to 1993, according to the “Advance Report of Final Natality Statistics, 1993,” the annual report on birth patterns in America¹.

After increasing steadily between 1986 and 1991, the birth rate for girls ages 15–17 declined two percent from 1991 to 1992 and was unchanged in 1993 at 37.8 births per 1,000. The birth rate for older teens ages 18 and 19 was down three percent in 1993, to 92.1 per 1,000.

In 1993, there were more than half a million births to teenagers—more than 200,000 to those not even 18. The teenage population is growing, and if teen birth rates do not continue to decline, there will be a rise in the number of teen births over the next few years.

The 1993 annual natality report also documents the fact that the rate of nonmarital childbearing has been essentially unchanged for three consecutive years, at 45.3 births per 1,000 unmarried women ages 15–44 in 1993, after rising steadily over the past 50 years. From 1980 to 1991, the rate had increased 54%. Nonmarital births totaled slightly more than 1.2 million in 1993 and accounted for 31% of all births that year.

Overall, births in the United States declined in 1993 for the third consecutive year, to a little more than four million. The birth rate per 1,000 total population declined to 15.5, its

lowest point in 15 years. Birth rates for women in their 20s, the peak childbearing ages, declined in 1993 by two percent.

After rising steadily for almost two decades, birth rates for women in their 30s appear to have stabilized, recording just modest increases for the past few years. Still, there were more than 900,000 births to women in their early 30s, and the number of births to women ages 35–39—357,000—was higher than in any year since 1960.

More than 100,000 babies were born in multiple deliveries in 1993, the highest number ever reported. Live births in twin delivery increased one percent while the number of triplet and higher-order plural births rose seven percent.

The report documents maternal medical and lifestyle risk factors during pregnancy and their impact on the health of the infant.

—Cigarette smoking during pregnancy declined to 15.8 percent, down from 19.5 percent in 1989, the first year that information on smoking was recorded on the birth certificate. Smoking declined in all age groups; still almost a quarter of young white and American Indian women, ages 15–24, smoked during pregnancy. Smoking is a key risk factor for low birth weight and infant mortality.

—Prenatal care use improved in 1993, following more than a decade of little change, with 79% of mothers receiving care in the first trimester. Fewer than five percent of mothers had late or no care, the lowest level since 1969.

—The cesarean delivery rate declined again in 1993, to 21.8% of all births, continuing the downward trend noted in recent years following a rapid and steady increase through the late 1980s. The vaginal birth after cesarean delivery (VBAC) rate increased eight percent in 1993.

Other measures of maternal and infant health were not so positive, the annual report shows.

—Preterm births (prior to 37 completed weeks) increased three percent in 1993 to 11% of all births and almost one in five black infants.

—Low birth weight increased from 7.1 to 7.2%, the highest level reported since 1976. Most of the rise occurred among white births (6.0 percent), but low birth weight is still much higher among black infants (13.3%). Low birth weight contributes to three-quarters of all infant deaths.

—The most frequently reported medical risk factors continued to be anemia, diabetes, and pregnancy-related hypertension.

Data in “Advance Report of Final Natality Statistics, 1993” are based on the birth certificates filed in State vital statistics offices and reported to NCHS through the Vital Statistics Cooperative Program.

Report to Congress on Out-of-Wedlock Childbearing Released

The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 requires that the Secretary of Health and Human Services, in conjunction with the National Center for Health Statistics, prepare an analysis of the increases in nonmarital births, provide comparative data from foreign nations, and identify potential causes, antecedents, and remedial measures.

This report to Congress has been released and is now available to policy-makers, analysts, educators, and researchers². The comprehensive report includes a chartbook of trend and current data from NCHS and other source as well as a series of expert papers focusing on various

issues in unmarried childbearing.

The chartbook contains 60 figures and accompanying text and 24 detailed tables. It is organized around several subject areas, including trends and differentials in nonmarital childbearing; factors affecting changes in the number and proportion of nonmarital births; the "path" to nonmarital fertility and subsequent marriage and childbearing; transfer payments and unmarried mothers; and international comparisons.

The expert papers focus on the decline in marriage, impact of family structure, effects of the welfare system, the role of neighborhoods and labor market conditions, access and use of services to prevent nonmarital births, attitudes toward nonmarital childbearing, risk factors for adolescent nonmarital childbearing, the consequences of nonmarital childbearing for women, children and society, and strategies to reduce nonmarital childbearing.

The report was prepared by a working group of staff members from the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development of the National Institutes of Health, and NCHS. Single copies are available from NCHS while supplies last.

NCHS Publications Available on CD-ROM

A CD-ROM featuring the full text of "Health, United States, 1994," the annual report to Congress on the health of the nation, and other recent NCHS publications is now available.

The publications can be viewed, searched, printed, and downloaded using the Adobe Acrobat LE software on the CD-ROM. Functions of the software include keyword searches and on-disk help. Windows 3.0 or higher or Macintosh System 7 or

higher is required.

This CD-ROM is the first in a planned series of annual products that contain the most recent edition of the annual health report along with other NCHS reports published during the preceding 12 months.

Other publication on this CD-ROM include catalogs of NCHS publications and electronic products; "Where to Write for Vital Records," (a listing of State vital statistics offices and instructions for obtaining copies of birth, death, marriage, and divorce records); and reports in the "Vital and Health Statistics Series, Advance Data," and the "Monthly Vital Statistics Report."

1994 Vital Statistics Summary Shows a Drop in Homicide

The number of homicides in the United States dropped significantly in 1994, according to provisional 1994 data released in the "Annual Summary of Births, Marriages, Divorces, and Deaths: United States, 1994," the most recent full-year vital statistics report available from NCHS³. The report shows there were 23,730 homicides in 1994, down from 25,470 in 1993.

The report shows age-adjusted death rates from homicide and legal intervention fell by eight percent, from 10.5 deaths per 100,000 in 1993 to 9.7 in 1994, continuing the downward trend that started in 1992. Provisional data for the first three months of 1995 indicate this trend is continuing. From 1987 through 1991, the homicide rate had risen at an average of five percent per year.

Firearm homicide rates also fell six percent for the whole U.S. population in 1994, although age-adjusted firearm suicide and unintentional firearm death rates remained stable.

For the U.S. population as a whole, homicide fell from the tenth leading cause of death to eleventh. Homicide is still the second leading killer for young Americans ages 15-24, and it is third for young children ages 5-14.

Meanwhile, chronic liver disease and cirrhosis mortality did not increase significantly in 1994, but still replaced homicide and legal intervention as the tenth leading cause of death.

The report also shows the estimated number of people who died from HIV increased nine percent from 38,500 in 1993 to 41,930 in 1994. However, the 1994 increase was less than the increase between 1992 and 1993 (15%) HIV remains the eighth leading cause of death in the U.S. and the leading cause of death for persons ages 25-44.

NCHS publications and assistance in obtaining printed and electronic data products are available from the NCHS Data Dissemination Branch, Room 1064, 6525 Belcrest Rd., Hyattsville, MD 20782; tel. 301-436-8500.

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References

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