

## Teen pregnancy, abortion rates rise

By Sharon Jayson, USA TODAY

The teen pregnancy rate in the USA rose 3% in 2006, the first increase in more than a decade, according to data out today. The data also show higher rates of births and abortions among girls 15-19.

The numbers, calculated by the Guttmacher Institute, a non-profit group that studies reproductive and sexual health, show a clear reversal from the downward trend that began in the 1990s.

About 7% of teen girls got pregnant in 2006, a rate of 71.5 pregnancies per 1,000 teens. That's up slightly from 69.5 in 2005, Guttmacher says. In 1990, when rates peaked, about 12% got pregnant.

Just as the long-term declines in teen pregnancy were for all racial and ethnic groups, the rise in 2006 was for all demographics, the report shows.

Guttmacher and others suggest the increase is related to a focus on abstinence-only sex education programs under the Bush administration.

Funding for abstinence doubled from 2000 to 2003, to \$120 million. By 2008, funding was at \$176 million. Guttmacher is an outspoken opponent of abstinence-only education.

"The focus on abstinence and the shifts in pregnancy occurred about the same time," says Guttmacher's Lawrence Finer.

"The issue here is clearly that we have a lot of teenagers who are having sex, but they aren't careful enough at contraception to avoid pregnancy," says Sarah Brown, executive director of the nonprofit National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, who has seen Guttmacher's numbers.



Some speculated a rise in teen birth rates reported last year was a result of fewer abortions, but the data show otherwise. "There isn't enough evidence to say there's a causal relationship, but pregnancies overall are increasing, regardless of whether they're carried to term or not," Finer says.

Those on the other side cry foul. "To me, it appears to be another opportunity to throw a barb at abstinence education," says Valerie Huber of the National Abstinence Education Association. She says that only a quarter of federal funding for teen sexuality programs went to abstinence in 2008.

In 2006, two-thirds of all teen pregnancies were to ages 18-19; data do not reflect marital status.

Guttmacher's analysis shows a 4% increase in the teen birth rate and a 1% rise in abortion rates, based on federal statistics and Guttmacher's abortion research. The National Center for Health Statistics will release its pregnancy rate data later this year.