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Birth Rate Continues To Slide Among Teens

BY TIMOTHY W. MARTIN

The birth rate among American teens fell to its lowest recorded level last year, according to a government report, a decline that experts attributed to more-effective sex education and the effects of a tough economy.

There were 34.3 births per 1,000 people 15 to 19 years old in 2010, a 9% drop from 37.9 births the previous year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Thursday. The rate has fallen in 17 of the past 19 years.

"We haven't seen a one-year decline like this since the mid-1940s," said Stephanie Ventura, a demographer for the CDC and a co-author of the study.

The nation's total number of births fell 3% last year, to four million from 4.1 million in 2009, the third straight year of declines.

Teenage birth rates peaked in 1991, when there were 61.8 births per 1,000 teens. Over the past two decades, the rate has gradually declined. Fewer teenagers now report having had sexual intercourse than in previous decades. And those who are sexu-

ally experienced are more likely to have used contraception than teens in the past, according to CDC data.

In recent years, the federal government has invested millions of dollars in more than 30 sex-education programs that research has shown to lower teen birth rates, according to teen-pregnancy experts. In previous decades, it was unclear which approaches would work and which wouldn't, said Bill Albert, chief program officer at the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, a non-profit, nonpartisan group.

The programs now have "become less of a body-parts conversation and more talking about relationships," he said.

The rough economy may also dissuade teens from wanting children, because they see their parents or older relatives struggling financially, Mr. Albert said.

Birth rates fell for most ages and all races, a sign that the sluggish economy is leading more women to delay having children. Birth rates fell during previous economic downturns, Ms. Ventura of the CDC said.