

# Briefly...

## A National Campaign Analysis of the Increase in the Teen Birth Rate

### How much did the teen birth rate increase between 2006 and 2007?

The teen birth rate for those aged 15-19 increased 1% between 2006 and 2007, according to preliminary data released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS).

This is the second straight year that the teen birth rate has increased after 14 consecutive years of declines.

The teen birth rate increased between 2006 and 2007 from 41.9 to 42.5 births per 1,000 girls aged 15 to 19.

### What is the age and racial/ethnic breakdown of the increase between 2006 and 2007?

The overall teen birth rate increased between 2006 and 2007 for teens of almost every age and racial/ethnic group with the exception of Hispanic teens. The teen birth rate increased by 2% for non-Hispanic white teens, by 1% for non-Hispanic black teens, by 2% for Asian/Pacific Islander teens, and by 7% for Native American teens. The teen birth rate decreased among Hispanic teens by 2%.

The teen birth rate increased between 2006 and 2007 by 1% for those aged 15-17 and 1% for those aged 18-19.

### What are the long-term trends in the teen birth rate?

The teen birth rate declined for 14 consecutive years between its record high in 1991 and 2005. During that period, the teen birth rate plummeted 34%.

FIGURE 1. Teen Birth Rates by Age Group

	1991	2005	2006	2007	Change '91-'05	Change '05-'07	Change '06-'07
Age 15 to 17	38.6	21.4	22.0	22.2	-45%	4%	1%
Age 18 to 19	94.0	69.9	73.0	73.9	-26%	6%	1%
Age 15 to 19	61.8	40.5	41.9	42.5	-34%	5%	1%

Overall the teen birth rate has increased 5% between 2005 and 2007.

The overall decrease in the teen birth rate between 1991 and 2007 now stands at -31%.

Despite the recent increase, the teen birth rate remains below its record high of 61.8 births per 1,000 girls aged 15-19 and now stands at 42.5.

### How many states have seen an increase in their teen birth rate?

In 2006 (2007 state-specific data is not yet available), 26 states experienced a statistically significant increase in their teen birth rate; only three states and the District of Columbia reported declines. Rates in 21 states remained essentially unchanged.

### ***Why is the teen birth rate on the rise?***

There is no single reason why the teen birth rate rose between 2005 and 2007, just as there is no single factor influencing a teen's behavior at any given moment. The National Campaign has examined those factors that likely help explain the increase from 2005 to 2006 (2007 data has not yet been analyzed). These factors are discussed in more detail below.

### ***Is some of the increase in the teen birth rate simply because teens with higher fertility now make up a greater share of the teen population?***

The overall teen birth rate can increase either because teen birth rates across racial/ethnic groups are increasing, or because those groups with higher fertility are becoming a growing share of the teen population, or a combination of the two. For the period of 2005 to 2006, both factors seem to have played a role in the teen birth rate increase, according to analysis done by the National Campaign.

More specifically, analyses by the National Campaign suggest that roughly three-quarters of the overall increase in the teen birth rate between 2005 and 2006 is due to increases in the teen birth rates for each racial/ethnic group, and only about one-quarter is due the fact that racial/ethnic groups with higher teen birth rates account for a growing share of the teen population.

It is also the case that older teens are more likely than younger teens to get pregnant and have a child. Our decomposition analysis of change from 2005 to 2006 suggests that older teens (age 18 to 19) account for roughly three-quarters of the overall increase in the teen birth rate and younger teens (aged 15-17) account for roughly one-quarter.

### ***Does the increase in the teen birth rate mean the teen pregnancy rate is also going up, or that more pregnant teens are giving birth rather than having abortions?***

It appears that the increase in the teen birth rate resulted from an increase in the overall teen pregnancy rate, rather than an increase in the proportion of pregnant teens who give birth. A teen pregnancy can, of course, result in a birth, an abortion or a miscarriage. An increase in the rate of births among teenagers can, in theory, reflect an increase in the overall rate of pregnancies among teens or a decrease in the proportion of pregnant teens who have an

abortion (or even a miscarriage), or some combination of the two. Unfortunately, we do not have all the data we need to identify the specific role of these two factors.

National data on teen pregnancy are available only through 2004; however, state teen pregnancy data are available through 2006 in 16 states. Fourteen of those 16 states reported an increase in the teen pregnancy rate between 2005 and 2006. Because these 16 states account for only about one-third of the teen births across the country, and because we do not know if the changes in the teen pregnancy rate they report are statistically significant (that is, the change is larger the margin of error in measuring the rates), we cannot say with certainty that teen pregnancy rates have increased nationally but these state reports at least suggest that teen pregnancy rates have increased along with the teen birth rates.

### ***What is known about changes in teen sexual activity and contraceptive use?***

It is not clear to what extent changes in teen sexual activity and/or contraceptive use drove the increase in the teen birth rate (and likely teen pregnancy rate). The most up-to-date data on teen sexual activity and contraceptive use (the Youth Risk Behavior Survey or YRBS) is for the period 2005-2007. However, YRBS does not include teens outside of school, and therefore reveal little about 18-19 year olds, who account for roughly three-quarters of the overall increase in the teen birth rate between 2005 and 2006.

For teens in school, YRBS data for 2005 and 2007 reflected small increases in sexual activity and decreases in contraceptive use that were statistically insignificant, but likely large enough to account for the 5% increase in the teen birth rate (and likely a similar increase in the teen pregnancy rate) between 2005 and 2007.

### ***In general though, it seems that the country's earlier progress in reducing risky sexual behavior among teens has stagnated, perhaps even reversed—why?***

There are likely many factors that, in combination, influence teens' decisions and behavior concerning sex, contraception and pregnancy. It may be that:

- Too many young people continue to think "it won't happen to me," and that too many underestimate their personal risk of pregnancy and STIs. In particular, concern about HIV infection may have decreased since the late 1990s.

- Not enough teens are getting important information about the value of delaying sex and the value of sexually active teens using contraception consistently and carefully.
- Older women may be helping shape the social script for teens. That is, the birth rate—particularly the birth rate among unmarried women—is up among women of all ages suggesting that the explanation for the increase in the teen birth rate may not rest on teen-specific factors alone.
- Fourteen consecutive years of declines in the teen birth rate may have led to complacency and may have diverted important attention, resources, and funding to other pressing issues.
- Other factors such as changing social norms, a series of high profile teen pregnancies, shrinking economic or educational opportunities, and real and perceived concerns about infertility may also be helping shape teens' decisions about sex, pregnancy, and childbearing.
- Young people themselves say that more parental involvement, better sex and relationship education, and a more realistic portrayal of the consequences of teen pregnancy in popular culture may help reverse the recent increase in the teen birth rate. (See *With One Voice 2009*, [www.thenationalcampaign.org](http://www.thenationalcampaign.org).)

### ***What should be done?***

The sobering news about the increase in the teen birth rate may very well serve as a wake up call for policymakers, parents, practitioners and others that the teen pregnancy and birth rates in the United States remain unacceptably high—even given the impressive overall decreases since the early 1990s. At the very least, it provides advocates and others concerned about early pregnancy and childhood an opportunity to highlight the issue and consider the following actions:

- The impressive declines in the teen pregnancy and birth rate suggest progress can be made. However, the recent increase in the teen birth rate suggests that efforts to convince young people to delay pregnancy and parenthood must be both more intense and more creative.
- The list of interventions that have been shown to be successful through rigorous research is growing. More communities should adopt programs and curriculum that have evidence of success.