

Briefly...

A National Campaign Analysis of the 2008 Teen Birth Rate

How much did the teen birth rate decrease between 2007 and 2008?

The teen birth rate for those aged 15-19 decreased 2% between 2007 and 2008, according to preliminary data released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS).

This is the first year that the teen birth rate has decreased after two consecutive years of increases during 2005-2007.

The teen birth rate decreased between 2007 and 2008 from 42.5 to 41.5 births per 1,000 girls aged 15 to 19.

What is the age and racial/ethnic breakdown of the increase between 2007 and 2008?

The overall teen birth rate decreased between 2007 and 2008 for teens of almost every age and racial/ethnic group. The teen birth rate decreased by 2% for non-Hispanic white teens, by 2% for non-Hispanic black teens, by 5% for Hispanic teens, by 6% for Asian/Pacific Islander teens, and by 1% for Native American teens. These decreases are statistically significant.

The teen birth rate decreased between 2007 and 2008 by 2% for those aged 15-17 and 4% 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	2008	Change '91-'05	Change '91-'08	Change '07-'08
Age 15 to 17	38.6	21.4	22.0	22.2	21.7	-45%	-44%	-2%
Age 18 to 19	94.0	69.9	73.0	73.9	70.7	-26%	-25%	-4%
Age 15 to 19	61.8	40.5	41.9	42.5	41.5	-34%	-33%	-2%

FIGURE 2. Teen Birth Rates by Racial/Ethnic Group (Teens age 15-19)

	1991	2005	2006	2007	2008	Change '91-'05	Change '91-'08	Change '07-'08
Non-Hispanic White	43.4	25.9	26.6	27.2	26.7	-40%	-38%	-2%
Non-Hispanic Black	118.2	60.9	63.7	64.3	62.9	-48%	-47%	-2%
American Indian or Alaska Native	84.1	52.7	55.0	59.0	58.4	-37%	-31%	-1%
Asian or Pacific Islander	27.4	17.0	17.0	17.3	16.2	-38%	-41%	-6%
Hispanic	104.6	81.7	83.0	81.7	77.4	-22%	-26%	-5%

The teen birth rate increased 5% between 2005 and 2007, and decreased 2% between 2007 and 2008.

The overall decrease in the teen birth rate between 1991 and 2008 now stands at 33%.

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

In 2006 (2007 state-specific data are 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 did the teen birth rate increase between 2005 and 2007?

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). More information is available here http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources/pdf/TeenBirths_ExamIncrease.pdf and http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources/birthdata/Kaye_Teen_Population_Shifts.pdf.

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 are related to the increase or the decrease in the teen birth 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.

What should be done?

In general while the recent decrease is good news, trends in the past few years suggest a continued need to focus on this issue. Clearly 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, a recent change in the teen birth rate 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 fluctuations in the teen birth rate suggest 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 curricula that have evidence of success.
- 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.