

TEEN BIRTH RATE INCREASE 2006:

Some Thoughts from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy

The teen birth rate in the United States increased three percent between 2005 and 2006—the first such increase in 15 years— according to data released last week from the National Center for Health Statistics. (Details about the teen birth rate increase can be found on page 2 of this document.) The increase raises several important questions: Why did the rate increase? Is the increase the beginning of a trend or a statistical anomaly? What can be done to reverse the increase and continue to drive down rates of teen births?

Why the Increase? No one really knows. Although teen birth data are available for 2006, comparable data on teen sexual activity, contraceptive use, pregnancy, and abortion are *not* yet available. Consequently, explanations about why the increase may have happened are simply speculation at present. Some plausible explanations for the increase include:

- Complacency may have become the enemy of progress. 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.
- The birth rate is up among women of *all* ages—women in their teens, 20s, 30s, and 40s—and among all racial and ethnic groups which suggests that a broader set of forces may be at play. In other words, the explanation may not rest entirely on teen-specific factors alone.
- The early wins may have been won. Future efforts may well have to be more intense, focused, and creative if the nation is to make continued progress in reducing teen pregnancy and childbearing. Put another way, yesterday's way of doing business will no longer suffice.
- This same vital statistics report also noted that in 2006 the nonmarital birth rate rose seven percent between 2005 and 2006, the largest single-year increase since 1988-1989. At present, four in five births to teens, 60% to those 20-24, and three in 10 to women 25-29 were to unmarried women. There is likely some relationship between the rise in the teen birth rate and the increase in the number, rate, and proportion of births to unmarried women of all ages.

Is the Increase a Surprise? The increase in the teen birth rate can fairly be described as a surprise but not a shock. A three percent increase is significant and caught most observers unaware. Even so, the National Campaign and others have noted that the impressive decline in the teen birth rate had slowed measurably in the past several years—an early warning sign of an increase. We also know that eight states reported increases in the teen birth rate in 2005 and another six states saw no increase or decrease, although the national rate continued to decline. At the very least, it is clearly too early to determine if the increase in the teen birth rate between 2005 and 2006 is simply an up tick or the start of a trend.

What Can Be Done? In the upcoming weeks, the National Campaign and others will try to determine what might account for the rise in the teen birth rate. At the same time, we will redouble our own efforts to shine a spotlight on the importance of continuing to focus on teen pregnancy. We will also encourage colleagues nationwide to use this sobering news to intensify their own programs and outreach to policymakers, practitioners, the press, parents, and, of course, teens themselves.

We welcome your ideas about both underlying explanations for the increase in the teen birth rate as well as steps the National Campaign should take to address this challenge. Please feel free to get in touch with us by sending your ideas in an email (please label the email Ideas for the National Campaign) to campaign@teenpregnancy.org.



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2006 Preliminary Birth Data from the National Center for Health Statistics

Overall teen birth rates

- The teen birth rate for girls aged 15-19 increased 3% between 2005 and 2006 (from 40.5 births per 1,000 to 41.9 per 1,000).
- The teen birth rate for this age group declined 32% between 1991 and 2006. This compares to a 34% decrease between 1991 and 2005.

Rates by Age

- The birth rate for girls aged 10-14 *decreased* 14% between 2005 and 2006 (from 0.7 per 1,000 to 0.6 per 1,000). The birth rate for girls aged 10-14 has declined 57% between 1991 and 2006.
- The birth rate for girls aged 15-17 increased 3% between 2005 and 2006 (from 21.4 per 1,000 to 22.0 per 1,000). The birth rate for this age group declined 43% between 1991 and 2006.
- The teen birth rate for girls aged 18-19 increased 4% between 2005 and 2006 (from 69.9 per 1,000 to 73 per 1,000). The birth rate for this age group declined 22% between 1991 and 2006.

Rates by Race/Ethnicity

- Teen birth rates for those aged 15-19 increased from 2005 to 2006 for all racial/ethnic groups except for Asian or Pacific Islander teens.
- Among those aged 15-17, birth rates increased for all racial/ethnic groups between 2005 and 2006 except for Hispanic teens (there was no change between 2005 and 2006 among American Indian or Alaska Native teens).
- Among aged 18-19, birth rates increased for all racial/ethnic groups except for Asian or Pacific Islander teens.
- The birth rate for non-Hispanic White teens aged 15-19 increased 3% between 2005 and 2006 (from 25.9 per 1,000 to 26.6 per 1,000).
- The 2006 birth rate for non-Hispanic Black teens aged 15-19 increased 5% between 2005 and 2006 (from 60.9 per 1,000 to 63.7 per 1,000).
- The 2006 birth rate for Hispanic teens aged 15-19 increased 2% between 2005 and 2006 (from 81.7 per 1,000 to 83.0 per 1,000).
- The 2006 birth rate for American Indian teens aged 15-19 increased 4% between 2005 and 2006 (from 52.7 per 1,000 to 54.7 per 1,000).
- The 2006 birth rate for Asian/Pacific Islander teens aged 15-19 *decreased* 2% between 2005 and 2006 (from 17.0 per 1,000 to 16.7 per 1,000).

Nonmarital Births

In 2006, the proportion on nonmarital births to teens reached a record high—84.4% of births to teens aged 15-19 are nonmarital, up from 83.5% in 2005. This is a total of 372,826 nonmarital births to teens. Among teens under age 15 the proportion is 98.3%; to those 15-17 it is 91.9%; and to those 18-19 it is 80.5%.