

# Even on decline, US teen births still highest in developed world

September 29 2010, By Sylviane Duval

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Teen birth rates in the United States are still 33 percent higher than in New Zealand, the developed country with the next highest incidence — even though U.S. rates have fallen from a high of 62 per 1,000 teens in the early 1990s to a record low of 41 in 2005, a new study finds. The number has since leveled off to about 42 births per 1,000 teens.

The study, which looks at trends in birth rates from 1981 through 2006 among teen mothers by age and ethnic background, appears online in the [Journal of Adolescent Health](#). Authors led by Phyllis Wingo, Ph.D., found that this leveling off started in 2003, for all but two study groups. The exceptions were 18- to 19-year-old white and Asian teens, which were still registering declines, and Hispanic teens, which showed increases.

Wingo, a former senior epidemiologist with the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), said that the growing Hispanic population in the United States and cultural factors, such as [condom use](#) and even birthplace, might account for the latter discrepancy. She also said that American-born Latinas ages 15 to 18 are more likely to have been pregnant than their foreign-born counterparts, but that the relationship is reversed in the 19-to-24-year age group.

The study reveals that, between 1981 and 2003, teen birth rates decreased significantly for all age, race and Hispanic-origin groups. Overall, teen mothers were slightly older than before and had a slightly higher level of education. Decreased percentages of young mothers were

married, and there was a drop in African-American teen mothers and a drop in teen mothers with two or more children.

While the authors attribute the decline to delayed experimentation with sex and increased use of contraception, they also suggest that abortion might not be a factor: abortion rates and [birth rates](#) both declined in this period according to the limited data available.

Patricia Paluzzi, president of the Healthy Teen Network, said that the study provides a helpful level of detail as different approaches and programs target different age and racial or ethnic groups.

“The study authors are on the right track, supporting innovative, multi-component, community-wide initiatives to reduce teen pregnancies and births in communities with the highest rates,” Paluzzi said. “Given the findings in this study, this comprehensive approach is needed to continue delaying births among [teens](#).”

**More information:** Wingo PA et al. Recent changes in the trends of teen birth rates 1981-2006. *J Adol Health online*, 2010.

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