

Big decline in births to girls under 15, CDC says

April 25 2018, by E.j. Mundell, Healthday Reporter



(HealthDay)—There's been a steep decline over the past two decades in

births to American girls under the age of 15, a new report finds.

Overall, "the number of U.S. births to females aged 10 to 14 was a record low in 2016, dropping to 2,253 from 8,519 in 2000," a team from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention wrote.

Said another way, that means that the birth rate in this age group fell from 0.9 per 1,000 females in 2000 to just 0.2 births per 1,000 by 2016.

And the pace at which these declines have occurred has accelerated over time, the CDC noted, with the greatest improvements seen since 2008.

Why these much-welcomed trends?

The CDC researchers said that "a number of factors have been cited," including a trend among the very young to delay first sex; decreased frequency of sexual activity; and "for sexually active teenagers, the use of effective contraception."

Dr. Jennifer Wu, an obstetrician/gynecologist who works with [young girls](#) and women, called the report "a huge victory from a public health standpoint."

"Pregnancies at such a young age pose large risks to the young mother," she noted. "Often the pelvis is still small and these pregnancies may end up requiring cesarean sections. This then has implications for future pregnancies."

And of course there's the impact that becoming pregnant so young can have on long-term outcomes for mom and baby.

According to study co-authors T.J. Mathews and Brady Hamilton, "Childbearing by very young mothers is a matter of public concern

because of the elevated health risks for these mothers and their infants and the socioeconomic consequences." Mathews and Hamilton work at the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS).

There was more good news from the report: The "race gap" in births to underage [girls](#) is also shrinking. In fact, the largest decline in births for girls aged 10 to 14 occurred among black girls, the findings showed.

The [birth rate](#) among black girls in this age group tumbled from 2.4 per 1,000 in 2000 to just 0.5 per 1,000 by 2016, according to the report. Similar steep declines were also seen among Hispanic and Native American girls.

Not every state benefited from these trends equally, however. Births to young girls tended to be highest in southern states, with Louisiana and Mississippi maintaining rates above 0.5 births per 1,000, the investigators reported. Delaware and the District of Columbia also had relatively high rates.

"Some of the states with the greatest reductions have worked hard at providing sexuality education programs in the schools," noted Dr. Brett Worly. He's an obstetrician/gynecologist at Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center in Columbus.

On Friday, the Trump administration announced it will focus on "abstinence-only" programs aimed at preventing teen pregnancies. Worly said that "it will be interesting to see how states with extensive sexuality education programs in public schools fare, compared with states where abstinence-only is taught."

And another expert said it's still too early for celebration over the new CDC numbers.

Dr. Michael Grosso is chair of pediatrics at Northwell Health's Huntington Hospital, in Huntington, N.Y. He noted that, despite some improvements, "U.S. [teen [birth](#)] rates remain among the highest among industrialized countries."

The findings were published April 25 as an *NCHS Data Brief*.

More information: Jennifer Wu, M.D., obstetrician/gynecologist, Lenox Hill Hospital, New York City; Brett Worly, M.D., obstetrician/gynecologist, Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center, Columbus; Michael Grosso, M.D., chair, pediatrics, and chief medical officer, Northwell Health's Huntington Hospital, Huntington, N.Y.; April 25, 2018, *NCHS Data Brief*, [Abstract/Full Text](#)

There's more on helping kids avoid pregnancy at the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#).

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