

# Big drop in US pregnancies seen since 2010

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Pregnancy rates in the United States suffered a steep decline during the last decade, new government data shows.

The overall U.S. pregnancy rate fell by 12% between 2010 and 2019, according to figures released Wednesday by the U.S. National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS).

The pregnancy rate among women aged 15 to 44 was 85.6 per 1,000 in 2019, down from 97.3 per 1,000 in 2010, the [report](#) found.

A drop in [unintended pregnancies](#) and [teen pregnancies](#) contributed to the overall decline in [pregnancy rates](#). Pregnancies among teens declined by more than half (52%) during the 2010s, added the researchers, who were led by [Lauren Rossen](#).

Likewise, unintended pregnancies experienced a 15% decline, falling from 42.1 per 1,000 in 2010 to 35.7 per 1,000 in 2019.

The drop in pregnancy rates is reflective of the overall decline in U.S. birth rates that has been going on since the mid-2000s, said [Phillip Levine](#), a professor of economics at Wellesley College in Massachusetts.

"The report is not terribly surprising," said Levine, who was not involved with the study. "We know that [birth rates](#) have been falling pretty dramatically, beginning around 2007."

The pregnancy rate is calculated from three components: live births; lost pregnancies; and abortions, the NCHS said. These are compared to the total female population.

Abortions experienced a heavy decline of 17% during the 2010s, while lost pregnancies and [live births](#) increased by just about 3%, the NCHS report noted.

An increasingly larger proportion of women in their childbearing years simply aren't getting pregnant at all, Levine said.

Many potential explanations have been suggested as reasons why young adults aren't having kids, Levine said—[financial pressures](#) like rising housing costs and student debt, a decline in religiosity, greater access to contraception, the decision to delay childbearing.

Levine argues that none of those explanations really seem to work, and that the falling pregnancy rate appears to be due to a larger societal shift regarding family priorities.

"If it's the case that people decide they're going to have their first baby at 30 instead of 25 or something like that, that would reduce the birth rate in the short term but eventually it would catch up, right? That doesn't seem to be happening. There's a reduction in childbearing over women's entire childbearing years. By the end of their reproductive period, they're having fewer children than they used to," Levine said.

"What it looks like is that successive cohorts of women entering childbearing age, as they move through their childbearing years, they are having fewer children," he added. "It's about this long-term movement towards lower fertility."

Young adults appear to be choosing to have fewer children—or no children—because they'd rather be doing something else with their lives than raising kids, Levine speculated.

Under this theory, greater emphasis is now being placed on individual autonomy and a corresponding de-emphasis on marriage and parenthood, Levine said in a paper published recently in the [Journal of Economic Perspectives](#).

"The specific manifestations of this shift are taken to include a decoupling of marriage and childbearing, a change in the relationship between education and childbearing, a rise in childlessness, and the

establishment of a two-child norm for those having children," Levine wrote with co-author Melissa Kearney, a professor of economics at the University of Maryland.

More recent generations of women have been raised with stronger expectations of having life pursuits beyond their roles as wives and mothers, Levine's team wrote.

Young couples also might have been influenced by the intense "helicopter parenting" they saw in their own childhood.

"They would have a different idea of what parenting involves," and could decide they're not up to the perceived challenge, they wrote.

Levine's report also noted that the U.S. birth rate, while in decline, is still higher than that of many other industrialized nations.

In 2018, the U.S. fertility rate was 1.73 births per woman, compared to 1.68 in the United Kingdom, 1.5 in Canada, 1.54 in the European Union, 1.42 in Japan, 1.56 in Norway, 1.76 in Sweden and 1.41 in Finland, the researchers reported.

**More information:** The Brookings Institute has more about [birth rate trends in the United States](#).

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