

November 2003

To: **Individuals and Organizations Concerned
About Teenage Childbearing**

From: Kristin A. Moore, Ph.D., Angela R. Papillo, M.A., and Jennifer Manlove, Ph.D.

Subject: Release of *Facts at a Glance* 2003, reporting trends in teen childbearing
in the nation, states and large cities

Teenage birth rates have declined continuously since 1991, and are at historic lows for each age group among teens. Preliminary data show that in 2002, there were 42.9 births per 1,000 15-19-year-olds, a rate 31% lower than the 1991 rate of 61.8 births per 1,000 15-19-year-olds. Birth rates are continuing to decline among younger and older teens, among all racial/ethnic groups, and in all states and the District of Columbia.

Although the teen birth rate continues to decline, there are several reasons to remain concerned about teen childbearing in the United States:

- The number of births to teens has not declined as much as the rate, due to the increasing number of teens in the population.
- An estimated 18% of current 15-year-old girls will have a birth before age 20.
- About 1 in 5 teen births are repeat births in the U.S.
- Nationally, 80% of all teen births occur outside of marriage. The high percentage of nonmarital teen births is due, in part, to a later age at marriage, an increase in cohabitation, and a decrease in the likelihood that unmarried pregnant teens will marry before their baby is born.
- While all racial/ethnic groups have experienced declines in teen birth rates, Hispanic teens continue to have higher teen birth rates than non-Hispanic blacks or non-Hispanic whites. Non-Hispanic white teen births have declined 30% and non-Hispanic black teen births have declined 38% since 1991, but the Hispanic teen birth rate has declined 17% during the same time period.
- Despite recent declines, a high proportion of teens are sexually experienced. Almost half of high school students (46%) have ever had sexual intercourse, and one in five teens (17% of girls and 22% of boys) has had sexual intercourse before age 15.

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Please visit the **Child Trends DataBank** for up-to-date information on U.S. children and youth: <http://www.childtrendsdatabank.org/>

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(OVER)

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TEN REASONS TO

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ON TEEN CHILDBEARING

The latest figures on teen birth rates in the United States may cause a lot of people to conclude that teen childbearing is no longer a pressing social problem. After all, these figures show more than a 25 percent decline in the U.S. teen birth rate over the past decade.

This is surely good news, and its importance certainly should not be minimized. But as researchers who have been tracking teen childbearing for years - and as concerned citizens - we have to acknowledge that this good news isn't good enough news. A closer look at the data shows that, while there are far fewer teen births today, too many teens are still becoming mothers before they should - with troubling consequences for the teens, their children, and the larger society.

In this special report, Child Trends draws on the latest statistical data and research to show why it would be premature - even foolhardy - to push teen childbearing off the nation's radar screen. While the nation is understandably preoccupied with such issues as terrorism, homeland security, and economic growth and stability, the issue of "kids having kids" hasn't gone away. There are many reasons to continue to be worried about teen childbearing in the United States today. This report sets forth the ten reasons that we, as researchers concerned with child well-being, find most compelling.

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