The U.S. rate of teen pregnancy is at an historic low. Pregnancy rates among adolescent females fell steadily between 1990 and 2005, and, while there was a slight rise between 2006 and 2007, subsequent data through 2011 indicate a return to the earlier trend.

Importance

Teen pregnancy is associated with negative consequences for both adolescents, and, when pregnancy is carried to term, their children. The great majority of teen pregnancies (75 percent in 2011) are unintended, although there has been a decrease in recent years. In 2011, approximately 38 percent of unintended pregnancies to teens, ages 15-19, ended in abortion, and most of the remainder ended with a live birth. Overall, as of 2011, 26 percent of teen pregnancies end in abortion.

Pregnant teens are more likely to have experimented with various illicit substances, and to meet criteria for disorders associated with alcohol, cannabis, and other illicit drugs. Even after accounting for the fact that teen mothers tend to be from disadvantaged backgrounds, teen parenthood is linked to greater welfare dependence soon after birth, and to poorer long-term educational outcomes, as well as instability in family structure. Moreover, research finds that children of teen mothers fare worse on cognitive and behavioral outcomes than their peers with older mothers.
Trends

In 2011, the teen pregnancy rate reached a new low in the modern era. It declined by 55 percent between 1990 and 2011, from 118 pregnancies per 1,000 females, ages 15 to 19, to 52—the lowest rate reported since estimates begin in 1972. Among females younger than 15, there was a 73 percent decline from 1990 to 2011 (from 17.7 to 4.8 pregnancies per 1,000 females aged 14 years). Over the same time period, rates for teens ages 15 to 17 declined by 64 percent, from 75 to 27; and the rates for teens 18 to 19 declined by 48 percent, from 173 to 89. (Figure 1)

The pregnancy rate among female teens who are sexually experienced has also decreased similarly. In 1990, there were 225 pregnancies per 1,000 sexually experienced female teens; by 2011, that rate had fallen 48 percent, to 118 pregnancies. (Appendix 1)
Differences by Race and Hispanic Origin

Although white teens have a lower pregnancy rate than black and Hispanic teens (35 per 1,000 among whites, compared with 93 and 74 per 1,000 among Hispanics and black teens, respectively), rates for each of these groups have declined in recent decades. Rates for both white and black teens (ages 15 to 19) declined fairly steadily between 1990 and 2011, although both increased between 2005 and 2006. Pregnancy rates for Hispanic teens did not begin declining until 1992, although in the past five years declines for this group have been greater than for other racial/ethnic groups. (Figure 2) The race/ethnicity gap has narrowed more for younger teens than it has for older adolescents, although the latest data are not available. (Appendix 1)

Figure 2

Pregnancy rates for females (15-19) by Race/Hispanic Origin: selected years, 1990-2011


Differences by Age

Older teens have much higher pregnancy rates than younger teens. In 2011, teens ages 18 to 19 had a pregnancy rate of 89, compared with rates of 27 among teens ages 15 to 17 years, and 1.0 among teens under age 15. (Appendix 1)
State and Local Estimates

State estimates are available from the following source:


International Estimates

International estimates for select countries are available from the following:


National Goals

*Healthy People 2020*, a federal government initiative, includes a goal to reduce the national rate of teen pregnancy from 40.2 in 2005 to 36.2 in 2020 among 15- to 17-year-olds, and from 116.2 to 105.9 among 18- to 19-year-olds. There are also related goals to increase the rates of abstinence and sex education, and, among sexually active adolescents, to increase use of condoms and hormonal birth control methods.

More information is available at: https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/family-planning/objectives?topicId=13 (Goals FP 8-11)
What Works to Make Progress on This Indicator


- Also, see the U.S. Office of Adolescent Health’s list of interventions meeting its criteria for effectiveness in pregnancy prevention: http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/teen_pregnancy/db/tpp-searchable.html

- This Office of Adolescent Health’s E-Update includes recommendations for communities, parents, and healthcare providers: http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/news/e-updates/may-2012.html

Related Indicators

- Teen Births: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=teen-births
- Fertility and Birth Rates: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=fertility-and-birth-rates
- Birth Control Pill Use: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=birth-control-pill-use
- Condom Use: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=condom-use
- Teen Abortions: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=teen-abortions
- Sexually Active Teens: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=sexually-active-teens
- Sexually Experienced Teens: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=sexually-experienced-teens
- Oral Sex Behaviors among Teens: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=oral-sex-behaviors-among-teens
- “Statutory Rape” (Sex between Young Teens and Older Individuals): www.childtrends.org/?indicators=statutory-rape-sex-between-young-teens-and-older-individuals
Definition

Pregnancies are computed by adding the number of live births, estimated fetal losses, and abortions. The number of births is obtained from the National Center for Health Statistics’ records of all birth certificates filed in the United States. Fetal losses are computed using estimates from the National Survey of Family Growth. The annual number of abortions is calculated from the Guttmacher Institute’s survey of all known abortion providers. Pregnancy rates are the number of pregnancies per 1,000 women in each specified age group. For more details, see https://www.guttmacher.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/us-teen-pregnancy-trends-2011_0.pdf (pages 23 to 27).

Data Sources


Raw Data Sources


(see Sources of Data in Appendix, p. 29-30)
### Appendix 1 - Pregnancy Rates (pregnancies per 1,000 females) for Adolescents: by Age, Race, and Hispanic Origin: Selected Years, 1972-2011

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Includes all persons of Hispanic origin regardless of race.

Rates computed by dividing the number of pregnancies to females under age 15 years by the total number of females aged 10-14 years.

Endnotes


2 Ibid.


9 Hispanics may be any race. Estimates for whites in this report do not include Hispanics of that race.

10 Rates for pregnancies to teens under 15 are computed by dividing the number of pregnancies to women under age 15 by the total number of females ages 10-14 years.