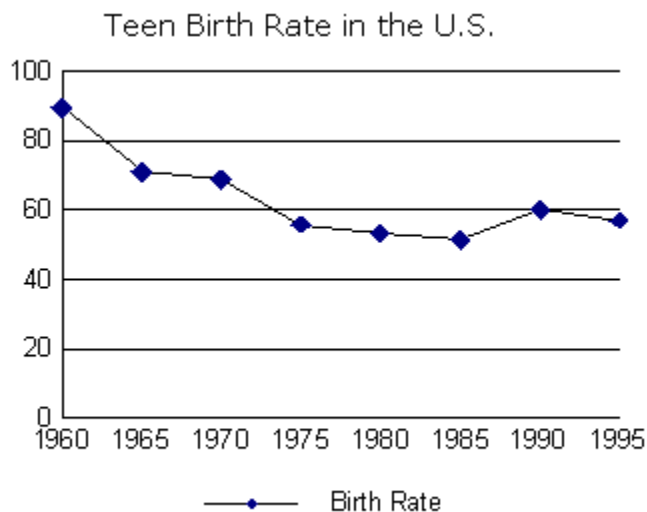


## Adolescent Pregnancy and Childbearing in the U.S.

Since 1990 the teen pregnancy rate (the number of pregnancies per 1,000 teenage women) decreased to 101 in 1995, the lowest level since 1975. Still, each year nearly one million American teenage women become pregnant. Four out of ten American teenage women become pregnant before the age of 20. The teen pregnancy rate for women under 20 increased significantly since the early 1970s, reaching a high of 118 in 1990.

At the same time, the outcome of teenage pregnancies has changed. Sixty-three percent of pregnant teenagers gave birth and 22 percent had abortions in 1995 compared to 1983 data which shows that 47 percent of teenagers gave birth and 43 percent had abortions. Fewer than 10 percent of teenagers who delivered babies chose adoption in 1995. By 1997, more than 500,000 births occurred to women under the age of 20.

Between 1995 and 2010, the number of girls aged 15-19 will increase by 2.2 million. If current fertility rates remain the same, we will see a 26 percent increase in the number of pregnancies and births among teenagers.



Source: National Center for Health Statistics

The teen birth rate (the number of births per 1,000 teenage women) declined significantly between 1960 and 1986, but large increases in the latter half of the 1980s resulted in birth rates that were higher than the previous decade. The teen birth rate has since declined to 53 live births per 1,000 teenage women nationally in 1997, including declines in every state. The teen birth rates varied by geographical region, with the highest rates centered in the southern and southwestern United States.

The majority of teen births occur to teens aged 18-19. In 1995, the birth rate for girls aged 15 to 17 was less than 50 percent of the birth rate for aged 18-19, regardless of race. In 1996, 22 percent of teen births, mostly in the 18-19 age group, were to girls who had already given birth at least once before.

Studies show that the teens who may be least able to financially support a child, are more likely to become teen parents. While teen pregnancy crosscuts all income levels, 85 percent of teens who give birth are poor or near-poor. Teen mothers have more children, on average, than women who delay childbearing, which makes it more difficult for them and their children to escape a life of poverty. In addition to

poverty, other indicators which consistently predict teen childbearing are family dysfunction, early behavior problems and poor performance in school.

According to a 1995 survey, 30 percent of births to women between the ages of 15 and 49 are unintended. The percentage of unintended births to women between the ages of 15 and 19 is drastically higher at 65 percent.

## Sexual Activity

According to a 1995 survey, 63 percent of American women 20-24 had sex for the first time before the age of 18 and 81 percent had sex before the age of 20.

| <b>Reasons for Recent Declines in Teen Pregnancy</b>   |
|--|
| ◇ Greater emphasis on delaying sexual activity   |
| ◇ More responsible attitudes among teenagers about casual sex and out-of-wedlock childbearing  |
| ◇ Increased fear of sexually transmitted diseases, especially Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS)   |
| ◇ Growing popularity of long-lasting contraceptive methods, such as the implant (Norplant) and the injectable (Depo-Provera) options, and possibly more correct use of other contraceptive methods |
| ◇ A stronger economy with better job prospects for young people  |

Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation

Fifty percent of women aged 15-19 and 55 percent of men aged 15-19 have had intercourse, according to a 1995 survey, compared to 35 percent and 55 percent respectively in the mid-1960s. In 1995, 22 percent of 15-year-old women reported having had intercourse.

The younger teens initiate sexual activity, the higher the probability that they will have more lifetime sexual partners. Those who are younger at first intercourse (15-17) acquire more partners more quickly in the first few years of sexual activity than older teens (18-19).

Teens who begin having sex at an earlier age are more likely to have experienced coercive sex. For women who were under 15 at first intercourse, 23 percent reported that their first intercourse was not voluntary. For those who were 16 at first intercourse the number decreased to 17 percent, and for those who were 20 years and over only 4 percent reported involuntary first intercourse.

## Contraception

While teens today are initiating sex at younger ages and have more partners than in the past, they are also more likely to use contraception, especially condoms. In 1995, 78 percent of teen girls used contraception at first intercourse as compared to 65 percent in 1988 and 48 percent in 1982.

While the pill was the most popular form of contraception among female contraceptive users aged 15-19, it dropped from being the first choice among females, decreasing from 64 percent in 1982 to 52 percent in 1990. Forty-four percent of female teenage contraceptive users chose condoms in 1990, up from 21

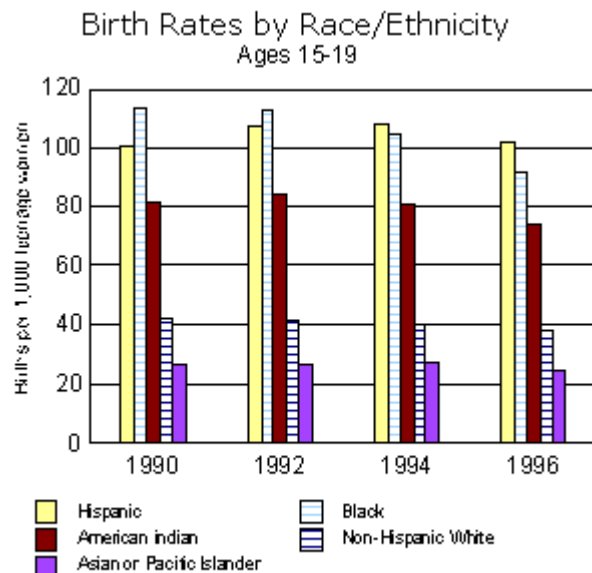
percent in 1982. Two-thirds of black teenage men and over half of white and Hispanic teenage men, reported using a condom the last time they had sex.

Unintended pregnancies are the result of three things: failure to use contraception, improper contraceptive use and/or inconsistent use of a method.

According to a 1995 survey, the percentage of women who used some method of contraception at first sex decreased as the age of first sex decreased. In 1995, 77 percent of all teenage women reported using contraception the first time they had sex, compared with only 53 percent in 1982. However, only 62 percent of sexually active teenage women reported using birth control every time they had sex. Forty-six percent of teenage males who use only condoms also report inconsistent use.

## Ethnic and Racial Comparisons

The largest decline in teen birth rates has been among black teens. Since 1991 the black teen birth rate has decreased by 21 percent from 115 to 91 in 1996 and is currently the lowest ever recorded. On the other hand, the teen birth rate for Hispanics decreased by only 5 percent in the same time period, from 107 to 102. The teen birth rates for both black and Hispanic girls are much higher than the rates for non-Hispanic white teens which decreased from 43 to 38 from 1991 to 1996.



In 1997, about 45 percent of mothers ages 15-19 were white, 27 percent were black, 25 percent were Hispanic, and 3 percent were from other racial or ethnic groups.

The percent of births to teens that were unintended varies significantly by race. In the 1990s, 67 percent of white teenage mothers who gave birth reported that the birth was unintended, 75 percent of black teens reported that it was unintended, and only 46 percent of Hispanic teens reported that it was unintended.

## Out-of-Wedlock Births to Teens

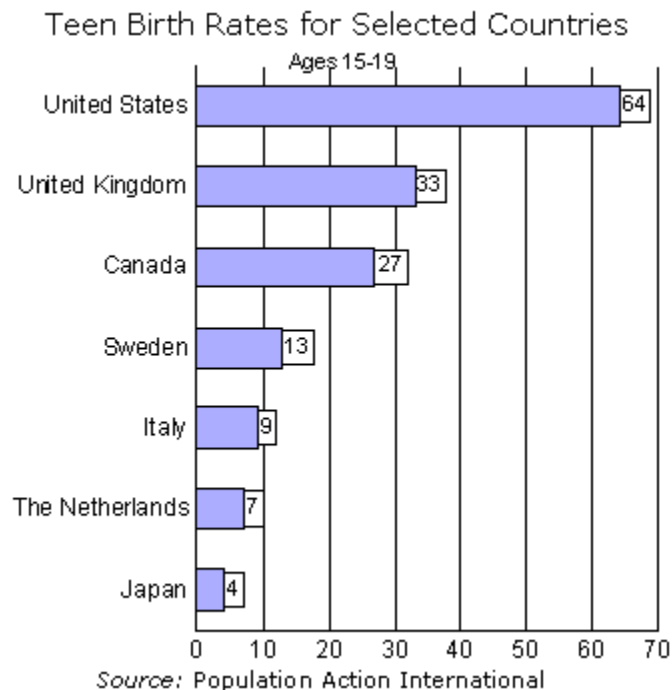
As the social stigma of unmarried motherhood has lessened in recent decades, pregnant teens have become less likely to get married before giving birth. Furthermore, earlier age at first sex and an increasing age at first marriage has led to pregnant teens being less likely to get married before giving birth.

As the teen birth rate has been declining, the out-of-wedlock teen birth rate has been increasing. In 1996, 76 percent of teen births occurred to unmarried females, whereas in 1960 only 15 percent of teen births were to unmarried teens. However, teens account for only 31 percent of all out-of-wedlock births.

Out-of-wedlock teen births differed greatly by race. In 1995, 94 percent of black teens who gave birth were unmarried whereas 72 percent and 75 percent of births to white and Hispanic teens respectively were out-of-wedlock. The largest increases in out-of-wedlock births have been among white teens.

## International Comparison

Teen pregnancy, birth and abortion rates in the U.S. are the highest in the Western world. Unlike the U.S., teen birth rates have fallen dramatically in much of Western Europe, where effective contraceptive use is higher.



Even those states in the U.S. with low teen birth rates have higher rates than found in most other industrialized nations. The state with the lowest teen birth rate in 1996 was New Hampshire, with a rate of 29 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19. Mississippi on the other hand, had a teen birth rate of 76 in 1996.

## The Costs of Teen Births

Nearly 80 percent of teen mothers eventually go on welfare - comprising more than 59 percent of the Aid to Families with Dependent Children caseload - and more than 75 percent of all unmarried teen mothers received welfare within five years of giving birth to their first child. Data for 1995 show that 69 percent of births to teens in a five-year period were paid for by Medicaid or other government sources.

Adolescent childbearing has also been associated with reduced educational attainment and employment opportunities. Less than one-third of teens who begin their families before age 18 ever complete high school.

When compared to children born to women aged 20 and older, babies born to mothers aged 15-17 have poorer health, lower cognitive development, reduced educational attainments, and higher rates of behavior problems.

The personal impact of teenage childbearing is twofold, diminishing opportunities of both the child and the mother. In addition, the children of adolescent parents are more likely to become adolescent parents themselves and are, thus, more likely to perpetuate the cycle.

---

This executive summary was prepared by Jennifer Cushman of the Population Resource Center in 1999, and reviewed by Barbara W. Sugland, Sc.D., Senior Research Associate of Child Trends, Inc. Sources include: General Accounting Office, *Teen Mothers: Selected Socio-Demographic Characteristics and Risk Factors*; Child Trends, Inc., *Facts at a Glance*; National Center for Health Statistics, *Declines in Teenage Birth Rates, 1991-97: National and State Patterns*; Alan Guttmacher Institute, *Facts in Brief, Falling Teen Pregnancy, Birthrates: What's Behind the Declines?*, *Sharing Responsibility: Women, Society & Abortion Worldwide*; The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *When Teens Have Sex: Issues and Trends*; For more information, contact the Population Resource Center at (202)467-5030, 1725 K Street, NW, Suite 1102, Washington, D.C., 20006; or (609)452-2822, 15 Roszel Road, Princeton, NJ, 08540.