

Black teen birth rate falls 60 percent in 10 years

Written by Maya Rhodan NNPA Washington Correspondent
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WASHINGTON (NNPA) – A new report by the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention shows that the teen birth rate for African Americans has declined by 60 percent between 1991 and 2011 – a rate 10 percent greater than the overall dip in teen birth rates.

Over the past decade, the national teen birth rate has declined from 31 out of every 1,000 girls between 15-19 giving birth in 2011, compared to 61 girls per 1,000 in 1991.

From 2007-2011, the national teen birth rate declined by 25 percent with Hispanic teens experiencing the largest decline of 34 percent. In 2007, the Hispanic teen birth rate was 21 percent higher than the Black teen birth rate, in 2011 it was only 4 percent higher.

Dr. Howard Koh, assistant secretary for health at the Department of Health and Human Services, attributes these declines to stronger teen pregnancy prevention education and higher rates of contraception use among teens that have sex, but also the fact that many teens are deciding to delay sex altogether.

"We know that schools play an essential role in supporting adolescent health," Koh wrote in a blog post on Huffington Post.com "Research tells us that the longer children remain in school and engaged in learning, the better their life-long health."

Teens who have babies in high school, on the other hand, are less likely to attend or complete college, are more likely to rely on public assistance, and are more likely to live in poverty into adulthood, according to Koh.

The majority of states saw a significant decline in birth rates—with 34 states across the Southeast, Midwest, and Southwest reporting declines in the Black teen birth rate by at least 20 percent.

In eight states – Washington, Colorado, New Mexico, Nebraska, Minnesota, Utah, Rhode Island, and Alaska – Black teen birth rate declined by 30 percent or more between 2007-2011.

Earlier this year, a Guttmacher Institute report suggested that the decline in birth rate could be attributed to the abortion rate among teens. According to the report, African American teens had

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an abortion rate of 41 out of 1000 in 2008.

Bill Albert, spokesperson for the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, disputes the report's findings.

"A common misunderstanding is that people think the teen birth rate is going down because the abortion rate is going up," Albert said. "The good news is all three rates—teen pregnancy, teen abortion, and teen birth rates—are going down at the same time."

In 2011, more than 300,000 babies were born to teen mothers, a record low for U.S. teens ages 15-19. In 2009, 15-19 year-olds accounted for 15.5 percent of all abortions, at a rate of about 13 abortions per 1,000 teens. Ten years prior, there were 407 abortions performed for every 1,000 live births for teens 15-19.

"The fact of the matter is most parents and most adults simply don't know that the teen pregnancy rate has gone down as much as it has," Albert says.

He adds that peer influence and the popularity of television shows geared around teen pregnancy and teen motherhood, such as MTV's *Teen Mom* and *16 & Pregnant*, teens have been able to see firsthand the challenges that come along with raising a child while still a child themselves and have decided against it.

"There is power in positive peer influence, and I think there's a lot of that happening," Albert says. "More teenagers are deciding that these are not the years to get pregnant and start a family."

Although the rate has decreased significantly, there is still much work to be done in order for the United States to be on par with other established nations.

According to the National Campaign's website, the United States has a teen birth rate twice that of the United Kingdom, three times that of Canada, and ten times that of Switzerland.

Albert says, "We ought not determine this progress a victory."