

US birth rate falls for first time in a decade, figures show

Births in the US have fallen for the first time since the start of the decade, according to government figures.

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Overall, the number of births in 2008 declined two per cent from 2007, the first annual decline in births since the start of the decade.

The report, from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, was based on a review of more than 99 per cent of birth certificates for 2008, the first full year of the recession.

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Rates fell for teenage mothers, as well as women in their 20s and 30s, with the one exception being births among women in their 40s, which rose by four per cent, reaching its highest mark since 1967.

Experts say the most likely explanations are the recession and a decline in immigration to the United States, which has been blamed on the weak job market.

Some early birth information for the first six months of 2009 indicate a continuing decline of about three per cent in total births, CDC officials said.

Last summer, the agency gave a first glimpse of the 2008 numbers. The new report confirms the birth rate decline, and also gives a breakdown of births by age group.

The new report found that birth rates fell by three per cent for women in their early 20s, two per cent for women in their late 20s, and one per cent for women in their 30s.

The trend in those numbers indicates that the older women got, the less willing they were to postpone a birth, said the new report's lead author, Brady Hamilton of the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics.

The teen birth rate dropped two per cent, with the rate for Hispanic teenagers was the lowest reported in two decades. The teen birth rate had been declining from 1991 through 2005, but rose from 2005 to 2007.

Even so, women in their 40s still have babies far less often than younger women. The rate was about 10 births per 1,000 women in their early 40s, and less than 1 per 1,000 for women in their late 40s.

The rate for women in their late 20s was 115 per 1,000.

Experts note that the postponement theory may explain why younger women had lower birth rates, but doesn't fully get at why the rate for women in their early 40s rose so sharply.

Some speculated that more sophisticated assisted reproduction services may be paying off for older couples, or perhaps some divorced women are choosing to have additional children with a new partner later in life.

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