



News: December 28, 2007

<http://www.austinchronicle.com/gyrobase/Issue/story?oid=575589>

Report: Teen birthrate rose in 2006

By Jordan Smith

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics, the U.S. **teen birthrate** actually rose in 2006, the first such rise since 1991. The CDC reports that between 2005 and 2006, the birthrate for teens ages 15-19 rose 3%, to 41.9 births per 1,000 adolescent females – ending a 14-year downward trend where the birthrate fell 34% from the all-time high of 61.8 births per 1,000 in 1991. "It's way too early to know if this is the start of a new trend," **Stephanie Ventura**, head of the CDC's Reproductive Statistics Branch, said in a press release. "But given the long-term progress we've witnessed, this change is notable." And, Ventura noted, with just one year of data, it is "really too soon" to be able to explain the cause of the increase – it'll take some time to "piece together what the factors might be," she said.

The report is troubling to local **Planned Parenthood** officials who argue the best way to ensure the uptick is an aberration and not a trend lies in solid reproductive-health education – which they say has been crippled by a decade of spending on abstinence-only education programs. More than \$1 billion has been spent for abstinence-only education since 1997, even though studies have shown the programs have minimal, if any, effect on lowering the rates of teen pregnancies or sexually transmitted diseases. The rise in teen births "shows that the current agenda of requiring dangerous, ineffective abstinence-only programs isn't working," **Ken Lambrecht**, executive director of Planned Parenthood of the Texas Capital Region, said in a press release. "We need education programs in our schools that will keep teens healthy – by including information about abstinence as well as contraception, healthy communication, responsible decision-making, and prevention of sexually transmitted infections."

Also of note, the CDC's new report reveals the total number of U.S. births increased by 3% in 2006, with slightly less than 4.3 million babies born. Additionally, the CDC notes the increase in birthrates for all women aged 15-44 means the "total fertility rate" – an estimate of the average number of births that women have over their lifetimes – increased 2%, yielding the highest birthrate recorded since 1971; it's the first time since then that the birthrate was above the "replacement" mark – the "level at which a given generation can replace itself."