

Number of teens giving birth drops

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ESCANABA — While contributing factors have yet to be pinpointed, a recent report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) shows an unprecedented drop in the number of babies born to U.S. teenagers. While health officials across the nation are celebrating the good news, local officials are taking the new numbers in stride.

According to the NCHS report, the rate fell 6 percent in 2009 — the lowest level ever recorded in its seven decades of tracking teenage childbearing. The 2009 childbearing rate for teenagers 15 to 19 years old was 39.1 per 1,000 births. In 2008, this number was 41.5, and 42.5 in 2007.

Dr. Teresa Frankovich, medical director of Public Health, Delta and Menominee (PHDM) Counties, explains while the new

numbers are encouraging, they need to be put into perspective.

"When you look at the national data, it is important to bear in mind that, while it is great to see improvements, our birthrates are still quite a bit higher than most developed countries," she said. "Our rate is 39.1, but if you look at Canada, they are at less than 13, or a lot of the European and Scandinavian countries — Ireland is at 16, Italy five, Sweden is less than eight — we have a way to go yet."

According to the report, the birthrate declined for all age groups under 20.

The report also showed teenagers are making up a smaller percent of all non-marital births recorded, with 21 percent in 2009. Researchers noted this continues a steady decline during the last several decades — especially from the 1975 number of 52 percent.

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At a glance

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Birthrate: Teens

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The most recent teen birthrate numbers held by PHDM are from 2008 — a year behind the NCHA report, said Frankovich. However, she said the county data tends to reflect the same trends observed in the national report.

"Overall, we've been reflecting what is being seen throughout the state and nationally, and we expect that to continue," she said.

Frankovich said analyzing the data from different areas can be confusing, since they sometimes compare different rates — i.e. pregnancy and birth. Despite this confusion, she said a birthrate decline is, undoubtedly, present.

One theory that Frankovich has for the decline is education and improved access to contraceptives.

"The general consensus is that the improved access and proper use of contraceptive is responsible for the decline," she said.

"There may be some

changes in sexual practice...the economy is also being considered as a factor."

In an effort to continue and increase the downward mobility of the teen birthrate, Frankovich said PHDM is maintaining applicable programming.

"The health department has standard reproductive health and family planning services for adolescents and women of child bearing age. We also offer education and counseling," she said. "As with most family planning programs, we encourage teens to wait to become sexually active, and do provide contraceptives to women of childbearing age."

"The health department assists women in obtaining reproductive health care, both through direct services and through referrals to local healthcare providers," she added.

For more information on the services offered by PHDM, contact 786-4111 or visit www.phdm.org. For more information on the teen birthrate, visit www.cdc.gov.