

CULTURE DIGEST: Teen birth rate decreases

By Erin Roach

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TEEN BIRTH RATE DECREASES 37 PERCENT -- Statistics indicate that the teenage birth rate in the United States decreased 37 percent from 1991 to 2009 to a record low, with the most significant decrease -- 50 percent -- among African American girls.

The report released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in April said overall approximately 4 percent of girls ages 15 to 19 gave birth in 2009, marking the lowest level in the nearly 70 years such data has been recorded.

"Paralleling the decline in births to teens aged 15-19 years during 1991-2009, the percentage of high school students who had ever had sexual intercourse and the percentage of sexually active students who did not use any method of contraception at last sexual intercourse both decreased," the CDC said.

Among key points from the study:

-- Teen childbearing costs the United States about \$9 billion annually.

-- Among high school students, 46 percent have had sexual intercourse. Among sexually active students, 12 percent did not use any method of contraception at last sexual intercourse.

-- Approximately half of U.S. teens have talked with their parents about how to say no to sex, or about methods of birth control.

"While these statistics certainly do not mean that teen sexual activity is not an issue of concern, they do compel us to examine what is working and what is causing teens to reject the 'everybody's doing it' myth promulgated in the media," Valerie Huber, executive director of the National Abstinence Education Association, said.

"While some argue that teens simply need access to more birth control and devices, perhaps a closer look would show us that they need more support for the good decisions they are making to abstain," Huber added. "Current public policy has failed to recognize and support the positive behavioral trends among teens by failing to provide resources for comprehensive risk avoidance sex education."

Huber urged leaders to increase the positive direction of teen sexual health by empowering teens with the skills to resist early sexual activity.