

Births in the United States have dropped to a 34-year low

Lingering financial worries from the recent recession and now COVID-19 could extend the trend



Births in the United States are down again, perhaps because people delay having children or don't have them at all during times of economic insecurity.

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By **Aimee Cunningham**

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For the fifth year in a row, the number of babies born in the United States has declined. It's the [lowest number of births](#) — just under 3.75 million in 2019, gleaned from birth certificate data — since 1985, according to the report published online May 20 from the National Center for Health Statistics. Since 2014, that number has been dropping 1 percent on average per year.

There's been a general downward trend in births since the Great Recession, which lasted from 2007 to 2009. In periods of economic uncertainty, births tend to [drop](#), says family demographer Karen Benjamin Guzzo of Bowling Green State University in Ohio. But rather than rebounding

after the recession ended, as would be expected, births have continued to fall. It's an indication that not everyone's prospects improved as the economy recovered, she says.

People like to feel certain about their coming years before they have children, says Guzzo, who was not involved in the new report. But many younger adults struggle with student loan debt, face soaring home prices and hold jobs that lack health benefits or sick days, she says.

Considering the costs for childcare and providing for their children's education on top of that leads some people to question whether they can afford to be a good parent.

"When the economy sort of writ large looks good," Guzzo says, "it doesn't necessarily mean it looks good for individuals and particularly for younger folks in their child bearing years." Even if young people are working, she says, "they're just not in a place where they feel confident in their future."

And, she adds, "this is all pre-COVID, so you can imagine this [uncertainty] is only going to get worse."

The report breaks down birthrates by age and the percentage change from 2018 to 2019.

Women in their 20s and early 30s saw a [drop](#). For example, women ages 25 to 29 had a birthrate of 93.7 births per 1,000 in 2019; that's down 2 percent from 2018. Meanwhile, the birthrate of women in their early 40s rose slightly.

A bright spot in the report is the teen birth rate, down 5 percent from 2018. It's now 16.6 births per 1,000 teenaged girls ages 15 to 19. That rate has plummeted by 60 percent since 2007, largely because more teens today have access to effective and long-lasting methods of birth control.

CITATIONS

B.E. Hamilton, J.A. Martin and M.J.K. Osterman. [Births: Provisional data for 2019](#). National Center for Health Statistics. May 20, 2020.