

Changes in Twin Births in the United States, 2019–2021

by Isabelle Horon, Dr.P.H., and Joyce A. Martin, M.P.H.

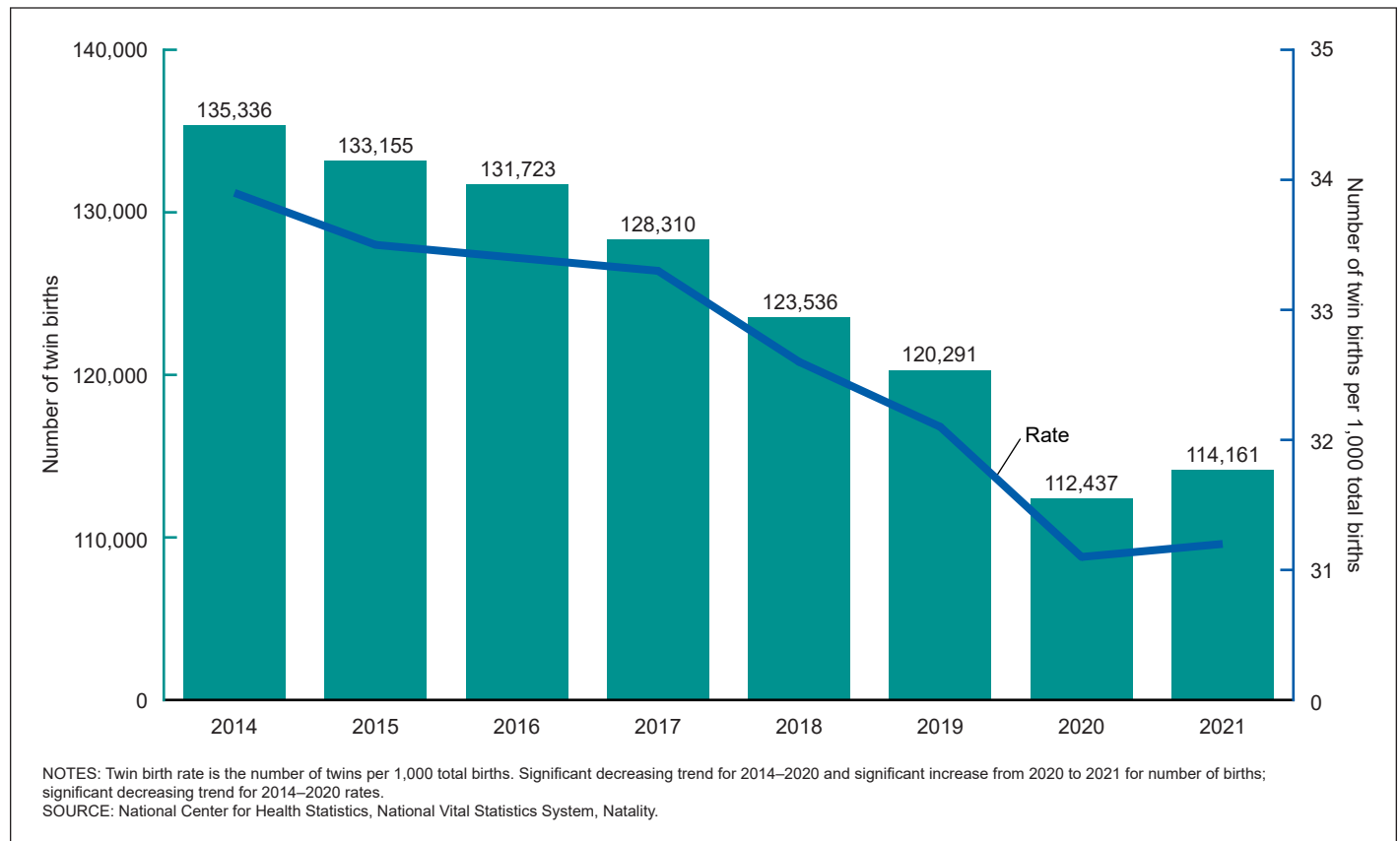
Abstract

Objectives—This report describes changes in the number and rate of twin births from 2019 to 2021 by month and year of birth and age and race and Hispanic origin of the mother.

Methods—Data in this report are based on final counts of births registered in all states and the District of Columbia for 2019–2021.

Results—The number of twin births in the United States fell by 7% from 2019 to 2020, compared with a 3% decline in the number of singleton births. The twin birth rate declined by 3%. By month, the largest declines from 2019 to 2020 occurred in November and December when the number of twin births declined by 15% and 19%, respectively, and twin birth rates declined by 10% and 14%. By maternal age, the rate from 2019 to 2020 declined by 11% for women aged 40 and over, 5% for

Figure 1. Number and rate of twin births: United States, 2014–2021



those aged 30–39, and 1% for females under age 30. From 2020 to 2021, the total number of twin births rose by 2%; the increase in the twin birth rate, from 31.1 to 31.2 per 1,000 total births, was not significant. By month, the twin birth rate declined by 7% in January 2021 compared with the year before and generally remained stable until the end of the year, when rates increased by 7% in November and 14% in December.

Keywords: maternal age • race and Hispanic origin • twin birth rate • National Vital Statistics System

Introduction

Twin birth rates began rising in the United States in the early 1980s but have been declining since 2014 (1,2). Because twins are at higher risk than singletons for poor pregnancy outcomes (2,3), changes in twin birth rates can influence national measures of newborn health such as preterm birth and low birthweight.

The rate of twin and higher-order multiple births is higher for women who receive infertility treatment to initiate pregnancy (4). Infertility treatment is any assisted reproductive treatment used to initiate pregnancy, including fertility drugs, artificial insemination, and technical procedures such as *in vitro* fertilization. On March 17, 2020, in response to the start of the coronavirus pandemic, the American Society for Reproductive Medicine (ASRM) recommended that reproductive medicine professionals temporarily suspend the initiation of new infertility treatment cycles and the transfer of embryos (5). These recommendations remained in effect until April 24, 2020, when ASRM issued guidance for preparing to resume care (6).

This report describes changes in twin births from 2019 to 2021, which includes the period when reduced access to infertility services may have further impacted the already declining number of twin births. Changes are described by maternal age and race and Hispanic origin because use of infertility services differs by these characteristics (7,8).

Methods

Data shown in this report are based on final counts of births registered in all states and the District of Columbia in 2019–2021.

Changes in the number of twin births for 2019 to 2020 and 2020 to 2021 are described by month, maternal age, and race and Hispanic origin. Changes in the twin birth rate, defined as the number of twin births per 1,000 total births, are also described.

Counts and rates are shown for maternal age groups (under age 30, 30–39, and 40 and over), and for the three largest race and Hispanic-origin groups (non-Hispanic White, non-Hispanic Black, and Hispanic). For brevity, references to race omit “single race.” Race and Hispanic origin are reported separately on the birth certificate and follow the standards issued by the Office of Management and Budget in 1997 (9).

Unless otherwise noted, all changes described in this report are statistically significant at the 0.05 level based on a chi-squared or two-tailed *z* test. Trends were evaluated using Joinpoint or the Cochran–Armitage test for trends. Computations exclude records for which information is unknown.

Results

Changes in twin births from 2019 to 2020

Changes in overall numbers and rates

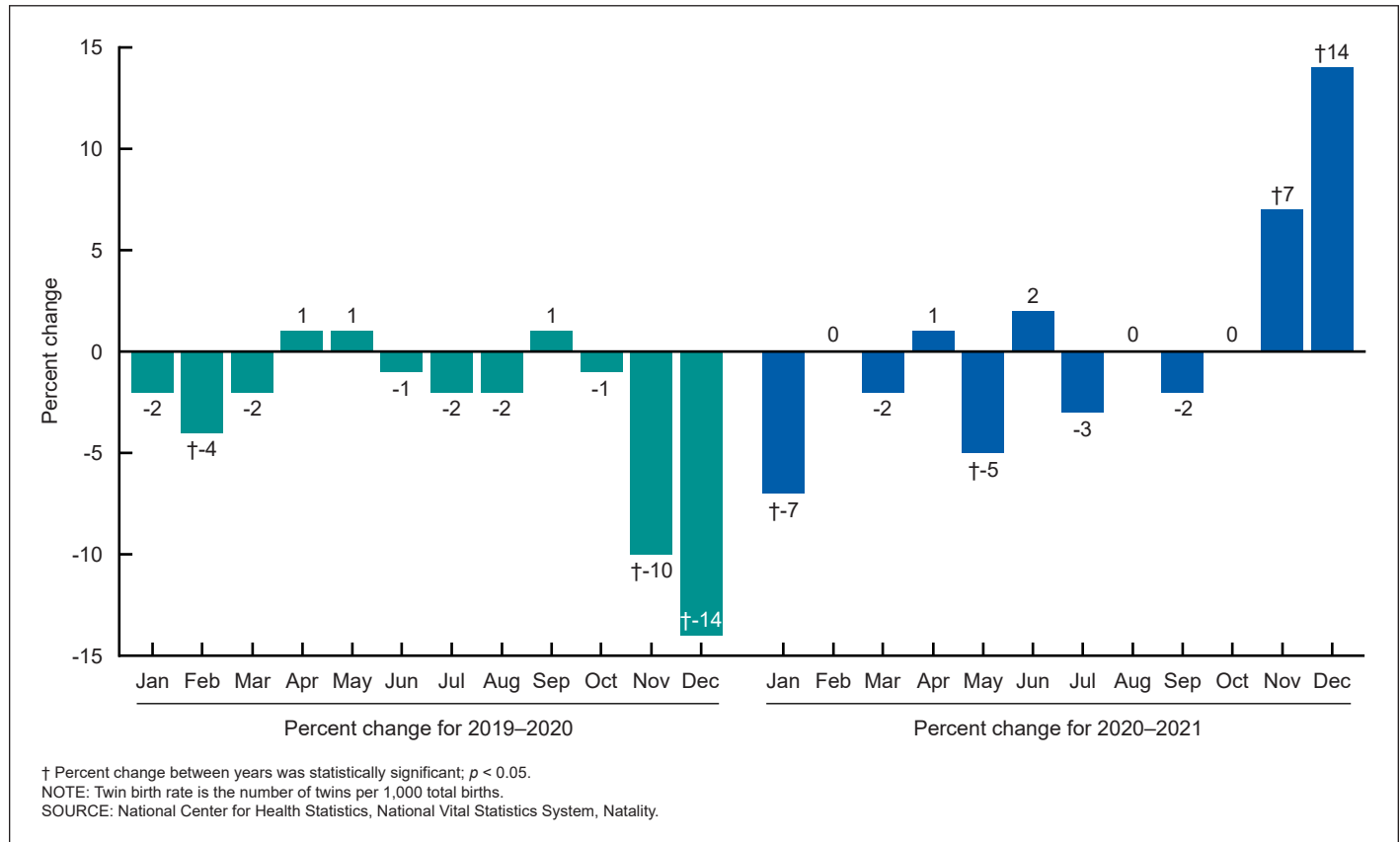
- The number of twin births in the United States fell from 120,291 in 2019 to 112,437 in 2020, a 7% decline. The number of twin births had declined by 2% per year, on average, from 2014 to 2019 (Table 1, Figure 1).
- A 7% decline was seen in the number of twin births from 2019 to 2020 compared with a 3% decline in the number of singleton births.
- The twin birth rate dropped by 3% from 2019 to 2020, from 32.1 to 31.1 twin births per 1,000 total births. A 1% average annual decline was seen in the twin birth rate from 2014 (33.9) to 2019 (32.1).

Changes by month

- The number of twin births declined from 2019 to 2020 for all months, although the declines in April (2%) and June (2%) were not significant. The largest declines from 2019 to 2020 occurred in November (15%) and December (19%). In November, the number of twin births declined from 9,741 in 2019 to 8,281 in 2020 and, in December, from 9,847 to 7,934 (Table 2).
- From 2019 to 2020, the only significant change in the twin birth rate through October occurred in February, when the rate declined by 4%. In November, the rate declined by 10%, from 32.7 to 29.3 per 1,000 total births, and in December it declined by 14%, from 31.9 to 27.4 (Figure 2).

Changes by age of mother

- From 2019 to 2020, the number of twin births declined by 6% for females under 30 and women aged 30–39, and by 11% for women aged 40 and over (Table 3).
- From 2019 to 2020, the twin birth rate declined by 1% for females under age 30 (from 26.4 to 26.1 per 1,000 births), 5% for women aged 30–39 (from 37.8 to 36.0), and 11% for women aged 40 and over (from 45.4 to 40.6).
- Declines in twin birth rates by month from 2019 to 2020 were largest late in the year, particularly for women aged 30 and over. In November and December rates fell by 15% and 16%, respectively, for women aged 30–39, and by 32% and 35% for women aged 40 and over. During the same 2-month period, the rate for females under age 30 declined only in December (9%).
- Twin birth rates by maternal age were highest for women aged 40 and over for all months in 2019, and in 2020 for January through July. Rates then began falling for this age group, and from August through November 2020 were similar to rates for women aged 30–39. In December 2020, the rate for women aged 40 and over (27.5) was 11% lower than the rate for women aged 30–39 (31.0), and was comparable to the rate for females under age 30 (24.3) (Figure 3).

Figure 2. Percent change in twin birth rate, by month: United States, 2019–2020 and 2020–2021

Changes by race and Hispanic origin

- The number of twin births declined from 2019 to 2020 by 6% for non-Hispanic White women, 5% for Hispanic women, and 4% for non-Hispanic Black women (Table 4).
- The twin birth rate declined by 2% for non-Hispanic White women (33.4 to 32.6 per 1,000 births) and 3% for Hispanic women (24.6 to 23.9) from 2019 to 2020. No significant change was seen in the rate for non-Hispanic Black women (40.9 to 40.7).
- From 2019 to 2020, changes in the twin birth rate by month fluctuated through October for the three race and Hispanic-origin groups. Rates declined in November and December for non-Hispanic White (8% and 15%, respectively) and Hispanic (16% and 12%) women and in December for non-Hispanic Black women (8%) (Figure 4).

Changes in twin births from 2020 to 2021

Changes in overall numbers and rates

- The total number of twin births increased by 2% from 2020 to 2021, from 112,437 to 114,161 (Table 1, Figure 1).
- The increase in the twin birth rate, from 31.1 to 31.2 per 1,000 births, was not significant.

Changes by month

- The number of twin births declined from 2020 to 2021 in January (16%), February (6%), and May (6%), and then increased 4%–5% in June, August, and October, 14% in November, and 22% in December. The large increases in November and December were in contrast to the large declines that occurred from 2019 to 2020 during these months (Table 2).
- The twin birth rate from 2020 to 2021 declined in January (7%) and May (5%), and increased in November (7%) and December (14%) (Figure 2).

Changes by age of mother

- The number of twin births increased by 4% from 2020 to 2021 for women aged 30–39; changes for the other age groups were not significant (Table 3, Figure 3).
- The twin birth rate declined by 4% from 2020 to 2021 for women aged 40 and over; changes for the younger age groups were not significant.
- By month, rates in January declined by 10% for women aged 30–39 and 26% for women aged 40 and over. Changes then fluctuated from month to month for all three age groups until the end of the year, when rates increased in November and December for women aged 30–39 (8% and 15%, respectively) and 40 and over (24% and 46%), and in December for women under age 30 (9%).

Figure 3. Twin birth rate, by month of birth and age of mother: United States, 2019–2021

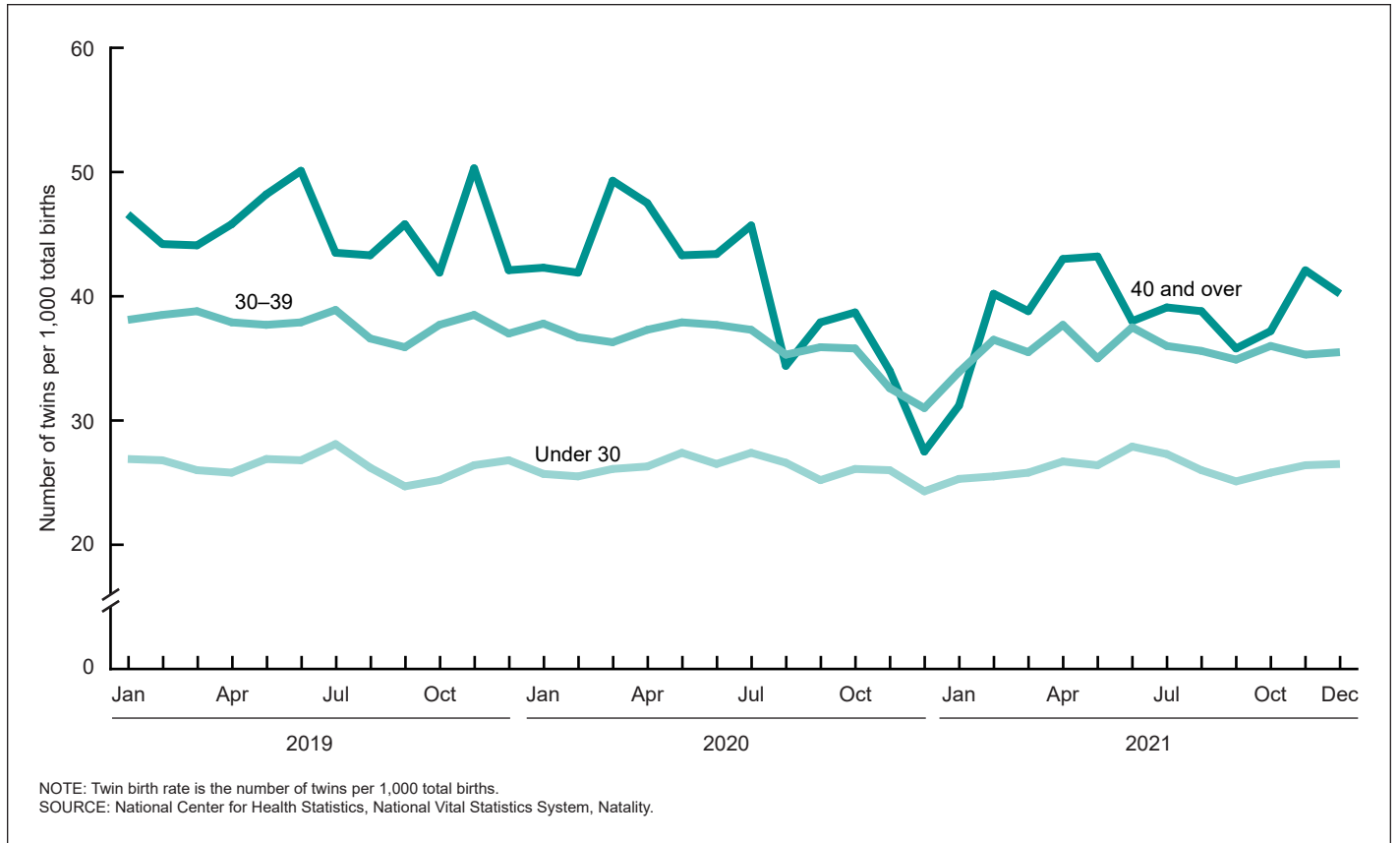
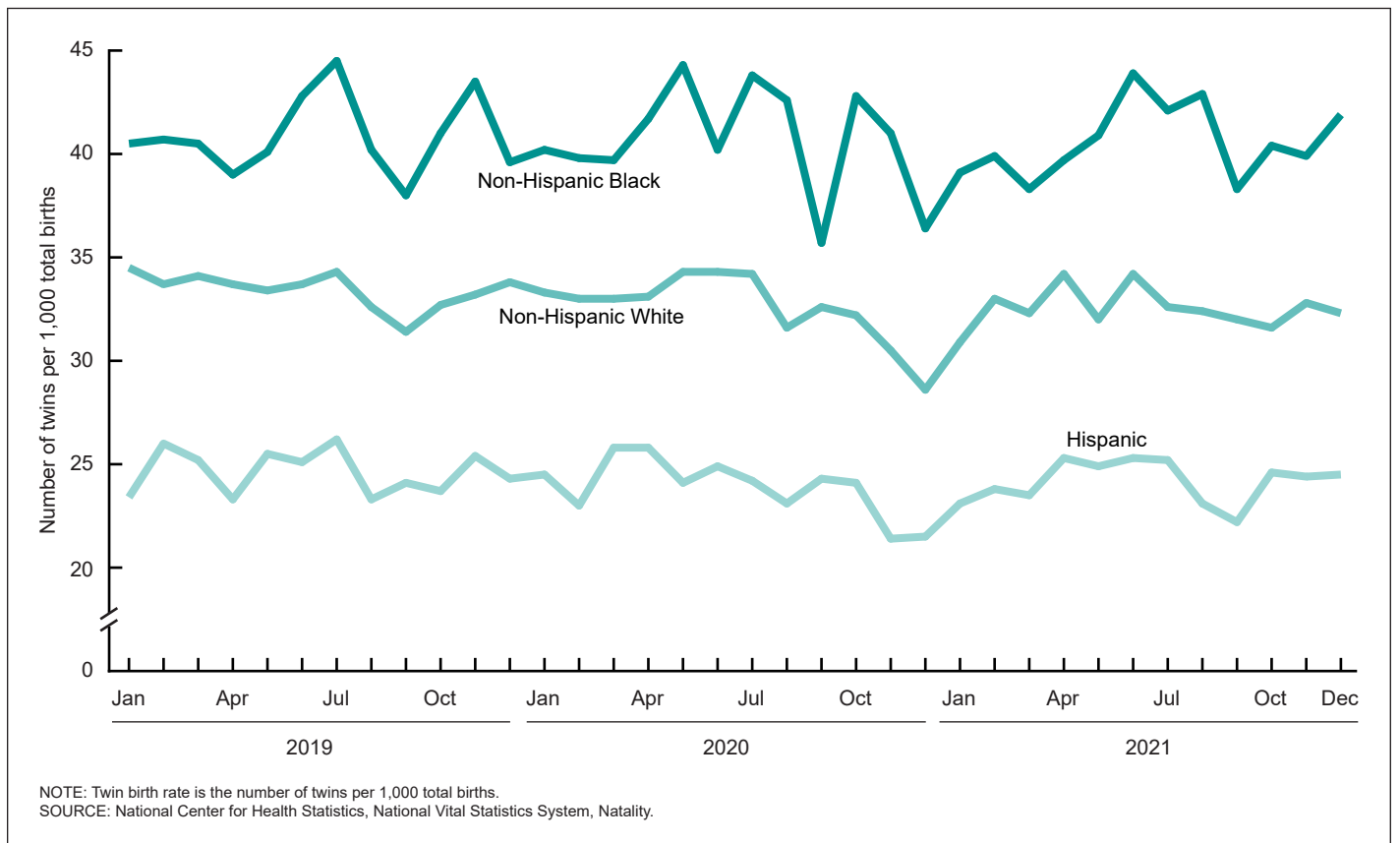


Figure 4. Twin birth rate, by month of birth and race and Hispanic origin of mother: United States, 2019–2021



Changes by race and Hispanic origin

- The number of twin births increased by 3% for Hispanic women and 2% for non-Hispanic White women, and declined by 2% for non-Hispanic Black women between 2020 and 2021.
- The overall twin birth rate did not change significantly between 2020 and 2021 for all three race and Hispanic-origin groups.
- Changes by month from 2020 to 2021 fluctuated for the three race and Hispanic-origin groups with no consistent pattern, until late in the year when rates increased for all three groups. Rates for non-Hispanic White women increased by 8% in November and 13% in December, and by 14% in both months for Hispanic women. The rate increased by 15% in December for non-Hispanic Black women (Table 4, Figure 4).

Summary

Following an average annual decline of 2% from 2014 to 2019, the number of twin births fell by 7% from 2019 to 2020 and increased by 2% from 2020 to 2021. In comparison with the 7% decline in the number of twin births from 2019 to 2020, singleton births declined by 3%.

The twin birth rate fell by an average of 1% per year for 2014–2019 and by 3% from 2019 to 2020. No significant change was seen in the rate from 2020 to 2021.

Declines in twin births were largest late in 2020 and early in 2021. From 2019 to 2020, the number and rate of twin births fell the most in November and December. From 2020 to 2021, the number and rate of twin births declined the most in January. Twin births occur more frequently among women who have had infertility treatment (4), and generally occur at earlier gestational ages than singleton births (2). The timing of the monthly declines in late 2020 and early 2021 coincide with a period of conception when the coronavirus pandemic began and ASRM recommended that reproductive medicine professionals temporarily limit infertility treatment (5,6).

The largest declines in twin birth rates during the period November 2020–January 2021 occurred among older women, the group most likely to use infertility treatment (10). Twin birth rates for women aged 40 and over declined the most in November and December 2020 and January of 2021, which corresponds with the timing of recommendations to suspend infertility treatment. Rates for women aged 30–39 also declined in these months, although to a lesser degree, and the decline for females under age 30, the group least likely to use infertility treatment, showed the smallest declines.

Patterns by race and Hispanic origin were somewhat less consistent with the recommendations regarding fertility treatment. Although Hispanic women are less likely than non-Hispanic White women to receive infertility treatment (7), the decline in the twin birth rate was larger for Hispanic than for non-Hispanic White women from 2019 to 2020. Also, the difference in the percentage decline in the number of twin births compared with singleton births was larger for Hispanic (5% compared with 2%) than non-Hispanic White (6% compared with 4%) females

(2,11). These findings suggest that the larger declines in the twin birth rate for Hispanic females may have occurred independently of changes in the availability of infertility services. Factors aside from the availability of fertility services, such as declines in births to older women who are more likely to have a twin birth naturally, may also have contributed to the overall decline in twin births.

Because twins are at higher risk than singletons for poor pregnancy outcomes, changes in twin birth rates can influence key public health measures such as preterm birth, low birthweight, and neonatal mortality. The decline in twin births from 2019 to 2020 may have contributed, in part, to reductions in the overall number and rate of preterm and low birthweight infants born in the United States that occurred between these 2 years (2,12).

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Table 1. Number of total, singleton, and twin births, and rate of twin births: United States, 2014–2021

Year	Number of births			Twin birth rate ¹
	Total	Singleton	Twin	
2014.....	3,988,076	3,848,214	135,336	33.9
2015.....	3,978,497	3,841,219	133,155	33.5
2016.....	3,945,875	3,810,149	131,723	33.4
2017.....	3,855,500	3,723,273	128,310	33.3
2018.....	3,791,712	3,664,651	123,536	32.6
2019.....	3,747,540	3,623,963	120,291	32.1
2020.....	3,613,647	3,498,335	112,437	31.1
2021.....	3,664,292	3,547,198	114,161	31.2

¹Number of twin births per 1,000 total births.

SOURCE: National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System, Natality.

Table 2. Number and rate of twin births, by month for 2019–2021, and percent change, by month for 2019–2020 and 2020–2021: United States

Year	Total	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Number of twin births													
2019.....	120,291	10,091	9,099	9,828	9,542	10,274	9,904	11,145	10,733	9,882	10,205	9,741	9,847
2020.....	112,437	9,656	8,789	9,521	9,320	9,891	9,744	10,482	9,847	9,513	9,459	8,281	7,934
2021.....	114,161	8,148	8,278	9,321	9,508	9,346	10,273	10,362	10,219	9,777	9,792	9,424	9,713
Percent change													
2019–2020.....	†-7	†-4	†-3	†-3	-2	†-4	-2	†-6	†-8	†-4	†-7	†-15	†-19
2020–2021.....	†2	†-16	†-6	-2	2	†-6	†5	-1	†4	3	†4	†14	†22
Twin birth rate ¹													
2019.....	32.1	32.5	32.5	32.3	31.9	32.5	32.6	33.4	31.4	30.3	31.4	32.7	31.9
2020.....	31.1	31.7	31.1	31.6	32.1	32.8	32.2	32.6	30.8	30.5	31.0	29.3	27.4
2021.....	31.2	29.4	31.1	30.8	32.4	31.1	32.8	31.8	30.9	30.0	31.0	31.2	31.2
Percent change													
2019–2020.....	†-3	-2	†-4	-2	1	1	-1	-2	-2	1	-1	†-10	†-14
2020–2021.....	0	†-7	0	-2	1	†-5	2	-3	0	-2	0	†7	†14

† The percent change between years was statistically significant; $p < 0.05$.

0 Quantity more than zero but less than 0.5, or less than zero but more than -0.5.

¹Number of twin births per 1,000 total births.

SOURCE: National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System, Natality.

Table 3. Number and rate of twin births by maternal age and month for 2019–2021, percent change by month for 2019–2020 and 2020–2021, and percent difference by age group and month for 2019–2021: United States

Maternal age group and year	Number of births	Total	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Under 30		Twin birth rate ¹												
2019.....	51,605	26.4	26.9	26.8	26.0	25.8	26.9	26.8	28.1	26.2	24.7	25.2	26.4	26.8
2020.....	48,325	26.1	25.7	25.5	26.1	26.3	27.4	26.5	27.4	26.6	25.2	26.1	26.0	24.3
2021.....	47,783	26.2	25.3	25.5	25.8	26.7	26.4	27.9	27.3	26.0	25.1	25.8	26.4	26.5
30–39														
2019.....	62,789	37.8	38.1	38.5	38.8	37.9	37.7	37.9	38.9	36.6	35.9	37.7	38.5	37.0
2020.....	58,844	36.0	37.8	36.7	36.3	37.3	37.9	37.7	37.3	35.3	35.9	35.8	32.6	31.0
2021.....	61,080	35.8	33.9	36.5	35.5	37.7	35.0	37.5	36.0	35.6	34.9	36.0	35.3	35.5
40 and over														
2019.....	5,897	45.4	46.6	44.2	44.1	45.8	48.2	50.1	43.5	43.3	45.8	41.9	50.3	42.1
2020.....	5,268	40.6	42.3	41.9	49.3	47.5	43.3	43.4	45.7	34.4	37.9	38.7	34.0	27.5
2021.....	5,298	39.0	31.2	40.2	38.8	43.0	43.2	38.0	39.1	38.8	35.8	37.2	42.1	40.2
Under 30		Percent change by year												
2019–2020.....	†-6	†-1	†-4	†-5	0	2	2	-1	-2	2	2	4	-2	†-9
2020–2021.....	-1	0	-2	0	-1	1	-4	†5	0	-2	-1	-1	2	†9
30–39														
2019–2020.....	†-6	†-5	-1	†-5	†-6	-2	1	-1	†-4	†-4	0	†-5	†-15	†-16
2020–2021.....	†4	-1	†-10	-1	-2	1	†-8	-1	-3	1	-3	1	†8	†15
40 and over														
2019–2020.....	†-11	†-11	-9	-5	12	4	-10	†-13	5	†-20	†-17	-8	†-32	†-35
2020–2021.....	1	†-4	†-26	-4	†-21	-10	0	-12	†-14	13	-6	-4	†24	†46
40 and over compared with 30 and under		Percent difference by age group												
2019.....	...	‡72	‡73	‡65	‡70	‡78	‡79	‡87	‡55	‡65	‡85	‡66	‡91	‡57
2020.....	...	‡56	‡65	‡64	‡89	‡81	‡58	‡64	‡67	‡29	‡50	‡48	‡31	13
2021.....	...	‡49	‡23	‡58	‡50	‡61	‡64	‡36	‡43	‡49	‡43	‡44	‡59	‡52
40 and over compared with 30–39														
2019.....	...	‡20	‡22	‡15	‡14	‡21	‡28	‡32	‡12	‡18	‡28	‡11	‡31	‡14
2020.....	...	‡13	‡12	‡14	‡36	‡27	‡14	‡15	‡23	-3	6	8	4	‡-11
2021.....	...	‡9	-8	‡10	9	‡14	23	1	9	9	3	3	‡19	‡13

† Percent change between years was statistically significant; $p < 0.05$.

0 Quantity more than zero but less than 0.5, or less than zero but more than -0.5.

... Category not applicable.

‡ Percent difference by age group was statistically significant; $p < 0.05$.

¹Number of twin births per 1,000 total births.

SOURCE: National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System, Natality.

Table 4. Number and rate of twin births, by race and Hispanic origin of the mother and month for 2019–2021, and percent change, by month for 2019–2020 and 2020–2021: United States

Race and Hispanic origin and year	Number of births	Total	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Non-Hispanic White		Twin birth rate ¹												
2019.....	64,011	33.4	34.5	33.7	34.1	33.7	33.4	33.7	34.3	32.6	31.4	32.7	33.2	33.8
2020.....	60,082	32.6	33.3	33.0	33.0	33.1	34.3	34.3	34.2	31.6	32.6	32.2	30.5	28.6
2021.....	61,438	32.5	30.9	33.0	32.3	34.2	32.0	34.2	32.6	32.4	32.0	31.6	32.8	32.3
Non-Hispanic Black														
2019.....	22,397	40.9	40.5	40.7	40.5	39.0	40.1	42.8	44.5	40.2	38.0	41.0	43.5	39.6
2020.....	21,554	40.7	40.2	39.8	39.7	41.7	44.3	40.2	43.8	42.6	35.7	42.8	41.0	36.4
2021.....	21,047	40.6	39.1	39.9	38.3	39.7	40.9	43.9	42.1	42.9	38.3	40.4	39.9	41.9
Hispanic														
2019.....	21,811	24.6	23.4	26.0	25.2	23.3	25.5	25.1	26.2	23.3	24.1	23.7	25.4	24.3
2020.....	20,709	23.9	24.5	23.0	25.8	25.8	24.1	24.9	24.2	23.1	24.3	24.1	21.4	21.5
2021.....	21,401	24.2	23.1	23.8	23.5	25.3	24.9	25.3	25.2	23.1	22.2	24.6	24.4	24.5
Non-Hispanic White		Percent change by year												
2019–2020.....	†-6	†-2	-3	-2	-3	-2	3	2	0	-3	†4	-2	†-8	†-15
2020–2021.....	†2	0	†-7	0	-2	3	†-7	0	†-5	3	-2	-2	†8	†13
Non-Hispanic Black														
2019–2020.....	†-4	0	-1	-2	-2	†7	†10	†-6	-2	6	-6	4	-6	†-8
2020–2021.....	†-2	0	-3	0	-4	-5	†-8	†9	-4	1	†7	-6	-3	†15
Hispanic														
2019–2020.....	†-5	†-3	5	†-12	2	†11	-5	-1	†-8	-1	1	2	†-16	†-12
2020–2021.....	†3	1	-6	3	†-9	-2	3	2	4	0	†-9	2	†14	†14

† Percent change between years was statistically significant; $p < 0.05$.
 0 Quantity more than zero but less than 0.5, or less than zero but more than -0.5.
¹Number of twin births per 1,000 total births.

NOTE: Race groups are single race.

SOURCE: National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System, Natality.

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