Teenage birth rates by race and Hispanic origin vary substantially (tables 3, 4, 8, and 9). Rates in 1999 were highest for Mexican, non-Hispanic black, Puerto Rican, and American Indian teenagers and lowest for non-Hispanic white, Cuban, and API teenagers, a pattern that has been observed since 1994. Despite the marked variation in rates (ranging from 22.3 to 101.5 per 1,000 aged 15–19 years), all population groups experienced notable declines in the 1990’s. Between 1998 and 1999, teenage birth rates declined for all race and Hispanic origin groups except Cuban and “other” Hispanic teenagers. The rates for non-Hispanic white and API teenagers fell 3 percent each, while rates for non-Hispanic black and American Indian teenagers declined 5 to 6 percent each. The rates for Hispanic teenagers as a group and Mexican teenagers declined 1 percent or less.

From 1991, when rates for teenagers generally were at a peak, to 1999, birth rates fell 22 to 30 percent for non-Hispanic white and black teenagers, respectively. Despite the increase in the rate for Cuban teenagers, their rate remains one of the lowest among population subgroups. The 1999 rates for API and American Indian teenagers were 19 to 20 percent lower, respectively, than in 1991. The rate for Mexican teenagers, currently the highest of all groups, has declined by 19 percent just since 1995.

Teenage pregnancy rates (based on the sum of live births, induced abortions, and fetal losses) have also declined in recent years (8–10). The pregnancy rate for teenagers 15–19 years fell 19 percent from 116.5 per 1,000 in 1991 to 94.3 in 1997, reversing an 11-percent rise from 1986 to 1991 (8, 9). (The most recent year for which pregnancy rates are available is 1997.) Further declines in the teenage pregnancy rate since 1997 are likely based on the sustained decline in the teenage birth rate.

The factors accounting for the current downturn in teenage pregnancy and birth rates are discussed in recent reports (7, 8). Briefly, the proportion of teenagers who are sexually experienced has stabilized in the mid 1990’s, reversing the steady increases over the past two decades (11). Many public and private initiatives have focused teenagers’ attention on the importance of pregnancy prevention through abstinence (12). Moreover, teenagers are more likely to use contraceptives at first intercourse, especially condoms (11, 13, and 14). Some sexually active teenagers have switched to implant and injectable contraceptives, which are effective new birth control methods (11).

Women aged 20 years and over: Women in their twenties—The birth rate for women aged 20–24 years declined very slightly in 1999 to 111.0 per 1,000. Since 1996, this rate has varied little, from 110 to 111 per 1,000. Earlier in the decade, the rate fell 5 percent from 116.5 in 1990 to 1996 (tables 4 and 9). The birth rate for women aged 25–29 years rose 2 percent in 1999 to 117.8, its highest level since 1992; this rate increased by 5 percent since 1995, following steady declines during 1990–95. Birth rates for women in their twenties, the principal childbearing ages, have been relatively stable over the