



Mass. teen birth rate drops, but disparities remain

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By [Matt Rocheleau](#)

GLOBE STAFF MAY 31, 2017

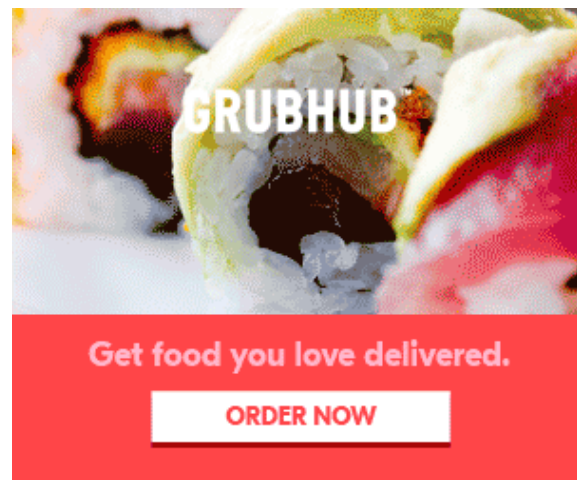
The teen birth rate in Massachusetts continued to decline in 2015, but the rates for Hispanic and

black teenagers remained far higher than the those for whites and Asians.

“Massachusetts is perceived to be such a socially progressive state, so I think people just don’t realize how far behind we still are on this issue,” said Nicole Castillo, public policy director for the Massachusetts Alliance on Teen Pregnancy.

The overall teen birth rate in Massachusetts in 2015 was 9.4 births per 1,000 girls and women ages 15-19, according to a recent [report](#) from the state Department of Public Health.

That was down from a rate of 10.6 a year earlier, 21.3 a decade earlier, and 35.4 in 1990.



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The state’s teen birth rate [historically](#) has been significantly lower than the national rate, which was 22.5 in 2015 and has also declined over the years.

Castillo said improved access to affordable birth control has been the biggest factor behind the trend.

When broken down by race and ethnicity, the teen birth rates in Massachusetts in 2015 were lower than they were in previous years across the board.

But stark disparities remained: For Hispanic teens in Massachusetts, the rate was 32.7 and for black teens it was 14.4. Meanwhile, for white teens, the rate was 4.5 and for Asian teenagers it was 3.



Castillo said the disparities are a symptom of economic inequality, and “We can’t talk about economic inequality without talking about race.”

Researchers [have said](#) economic inequality can cause young women who are poor to have low expectations about their future economic prospects, leaving them less likely to be concerned about the impact of having a child at an early age.

Experts have also said that [social factors](#), including differences in culture, religion, and [exposure to accurate sex education](#), may also be factors behind disparities.

The differences in the rates drove communities with large minority populations to have much higher teen birth rates than the statewide average. Holyoke had the highest rate, at 40.5, followed by Southbridge, 36.8; Chelsea, 34.3; Lawrence, 32.4; and Lynn, 32.3.

Teen pregnancies are typically unplanned and giving birth as a teenager can be “an impediment for a young person to finish their education and to flourish and have a good economic future,” Castillo said.

Only about 38 percent of girls who had a child before age 18 received a high school diploma by age 22, according to [statistics](#) released in 2012 by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. Among teen mothers who moved out of their families’ household, 67 percent lived below poverty, the organization said.

The children of teen mothers can also suffer.

Children born to teen mothers are more likely to be born prematurely and at low birth weight, which can lead to medical complications, according to the [organization](#). They are also more likely to suffer neglect and abuse, do worse in school, and wind up in prison.

Teen birth rate in Mass., 2001-2015

Figures show the number of births per 1,000 females ages 15-19.

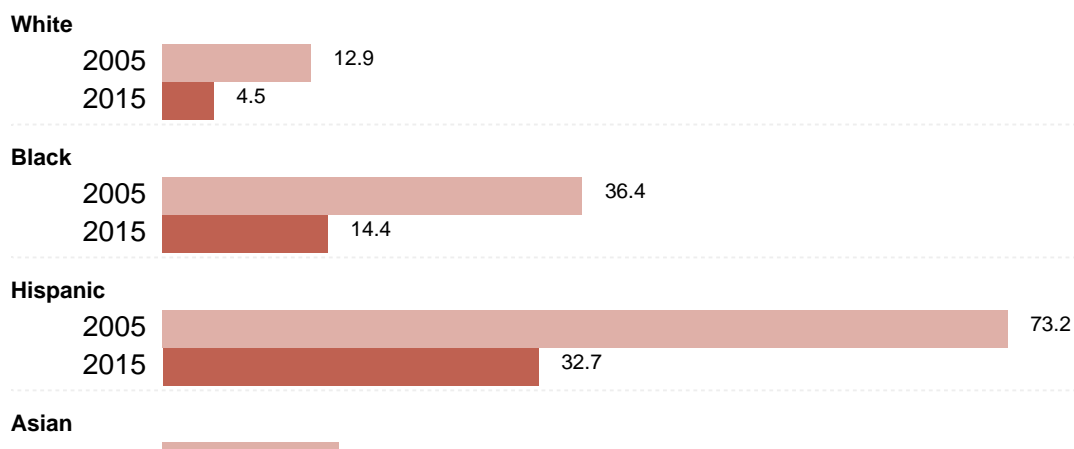
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Teen birth rate in Mass. much lower than national average

Figures are for 2015.

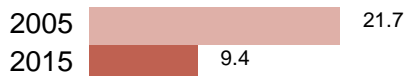


Teen birth rates in Mass. by race, ethnicity





Total



Teen birth rates for selected communities

Communities include the 25 Massachusetts cities and towns with the greatest number of teen births in 2015. They are listed by the teen birth rate in 2015, from highest to lowest. (Note: Because rates are based on 2010 population figures, the rates show for 2014 and 2015 may somewhat overestimate or underestimate the actual rate for some cities and towns.)

2015 rank	City/town	Rate, 2005	Rate, 2014	Rate, 2015
1	Holyoke	96.8	39.8	40.5
2	Southbridge	64.5	33.3	36.8
3	Chelsea	75	49.3	34.3
4	Lawrence	71.7	35.6	32.4
5	Lynn	47.3	29.2	32.3
6	New Bedford	58.9	33.3	31.9
7	Springfield	71.6	35	31.5
8	Fall River	49.5	28.4	29.1
9	Fitchburg	39.6	23.1	24.7
10	West Springfield	25	9.5	23.8
11	Brockton	40.7	26.2	23
12	Lowell	51.4	21.6	20.4
13	Haverhill	30.9	22.9	20.1
14	Everett	33	12.9	17.5
15	Worcester	37.2	16.3	16.8
16	Chicopee	41.4	18.6	15.9
17	Marlborough	26.9	15.6	15.6

18	Leominster	17.5	13.8	13
19	Pittsfield	52.7	23.9	12.7
20	Taunton	32.5	9.7	12
21	Revere	45.6	20.9	11.9
22	Framingham	23	14.9	11.5
23	Methuen	27.1	9.2	11.1
24	Boston	28.6	10.6	9.5
25	Quincy	23.1	8.1	6.6
-	State total	11.1	12	9.4

SOURCE: Massachusetts Department of Public Health, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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A group of teenagers discovered the venue had failed to live up to its obligations to hold three fundraisers a year to benefit the Department of Conservation and Recreation. [MORE...](#)

Police disperse hundreds of youths in the North End

State Police spokesman David Procopio said Boston police requested Massachusetts State Police assistance with dispersing between 500 and 1,000 youths. [MORE...](#)



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Mother of Conrad Roy III seeks \$4.2m in wrongful death suit against Michelle Carter

Lynn Roy says she is seeking damages “caused by the defendant’s negligence and wanton and reckless conduct.” [MORE...](#)



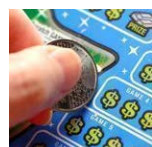
In the Michelle Carter case, the eyes have it

Judge Lawrence Moniz took great pains to explain that his job was to find that delicate balance between rehabilitation and punishment. [MORE...](#)



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