

[Print This Article](#) [Print this article](#)[Close This Window](#)

U.S. Children Fatter but Less Violent, Report Says

Fri July 18, 2003 05:57 AM ET

By Maggie Fox, Health and Science Correspondent

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - American children are fatter than ever before, but they are far less violent and far less likely to get pregnant than most people think, according to a government report issued on Friday.

The Report on America's Children, released by the National Institutes of Health, the Census Bureau and other agencies, shows infant and childhood death rates continue to drop and fewer teens are giving birth, but the number of overweight children aged 6 to 18 has more than doubled since 1980.

The report contradicts some strongly held beliefs, said Dr. Duane Alexander, director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

"Half the American adults surveyed believe that teen pregnancy is getting worse," Alexander told a telephone briefing.

"In fact, teen births have declined every year since 1991." For girls aged 15 to 19, the birthrate fell from 62.1 percent per 1,000 teens in 1991 to 43 per 1,000 in 2002.

"This is a statistic that is moving in the right direction," Alexander said.

Violent crime among teens is down, too, Alexander said. "Most people, about two-thirds, believe that crime is going up among America's children," he said. "The picture painted by this report, based on actual data, paints the opposite picture."

The report says victims reported 17 violent crimes per 1,000 juveniles aged 12 to 17, or 413,000 juvenile crimes in total. "This is a 67 percent drop from the 1993 high and the lowest rate recorded since the national victimization survey began in 1973," the report reads.

KIDS GROWING TOO FAST

Edward Sondik, director of the National Center for Health Statistics, said the real concern was the growth, literally, of America's children.

"In 1980, 6 percent of children aged 6 to 18 were overweight," he said. For 2000, it is 15 percent. That's two-and-a-half times what it was just 20 years ago," he said.

"Even more striking than that ... if you look at the figures for black children, 22 percent of black children are overweight," he added. Among Mexican-American children, 25 percent are overweight.

"This really is a major concern."

Doctors are now finding diabetes and heart disease in children, when 20 years ago those were diseases only of adults.

Smoking and alcohol use is also down among most groups, the report finds.

Among eighth-graders aged 13 and 14, 5 percent reported they smoked every day, about the same as 2001. But 17 percent of 12th-graders did, a decline of 2 percent from last year.

From 2001 to 2002, the report says, the percentage of 10th-graders who reported binge drinking fell to 22 percent from 25 percent. The proportion of 12th-graders, aged 17 and 18, stayed steady at 29 percent.

"Binge drinking is defined as at least five drinks in a row over the past two weeks," Sondik said. "These figures are too high."

Fewer children are being killed by firearms. Guns caused 19 percent of deaths among 15- to 19-year-olds. Deaths from car accidents held about steady -- 37 percent of the 15- to 19-year-olds who died in 2000.

Valena Plisko, associate commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics, said 87 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds had completed high school, up 3 percent from 1980.

Five percent of all U.S. children have trouble speaking English. The numbers doubled from 1.3 million in 1979 to 2.6 million in 1999, she said.

© Copyright Reuters 2002. All rights reserved. Any copying, re-publication or re-distribution of Reuters content or of any content used on this site, including by framing or similar means, is expressly prohibited without prior written consent of Reuters.

Quotes and other data are provided for your personal information only, and are not intended for trading purposes. Reuters, the members of its Group and its data providers shall not be liable for any errors or delays in the quotes or other data, or for any actions taken in reliance thereon.

© Reuters 2002. All rights reserved. Republication or redistribution of Reuters content, including by caching, framing or similar means, is expressly prohibited without the prior written consent of Reuters. Reuters and the Reuters sphere logo are registered trademarks and trademarks of the Reuters group of companies around the world.



[Close This Window](#)