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U.S. Fertility Up Slightly, but 8.6 Million Fewer Births Long Term

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National Center for Health Statistics data for 2021 show a slight increase in births, rising 1.5 percent from the 2020 level which was a 40-year low. Even with the uptick, the 3,659,000 births in 2021 were the third fewest in 40 years. There is little to suggest a substantial increase in fertility rates in the short term, though preliminary data suggest that births in the first three months of 2022 were higher than in early 2021 when COVID first impacted births. Contemporary trends continue a birth decline that began in the era of the Great Recession. The extent of this slowdown in births over the past 14 years is reflected in the fact that there were 657,000 fewer births in 2021 than in 2007: a 15.2 percent decrease. This birth decline occurred even though the number of women in their prime childbearing years (aged 20–39) rose by 8.5 percent. Births diminished because fertility rates declined significantly among women in their teens and twenties. Fertility rates diminished modestly among women in their early thirties and increased among older women. The long-term impact of the fertility declines has been substantial. Had 2007 fertility patterns been sustained through 2021, there would have been 8.6 million more births in the last 14 years. One stark statistic reflects the impact of continuing low birth rates coupled with increasing deaths due to COVID: more people died than were born in 73 percent of U.S. counties in 2021—the most in U.S. history. A critical long-term question is: how many of these births are being delayed, and how many will be foregone? Women who delayed fertility because of the Great Recession are now further challenged by COVID-19 and many are approaching the end of their childbearing years. Had the fertility patterns of 2007 been sustained, 3 million more women would have had at least one child by 2020. This has implications for health care, schools, child-related businesses, and eventually for the labor force.



In 2021, the United States recorded its third fewest births in 40 years. Over the past 14 years, there have been 8.6 million fewer births than would have been expected given pre-Great Recession fertility rates.

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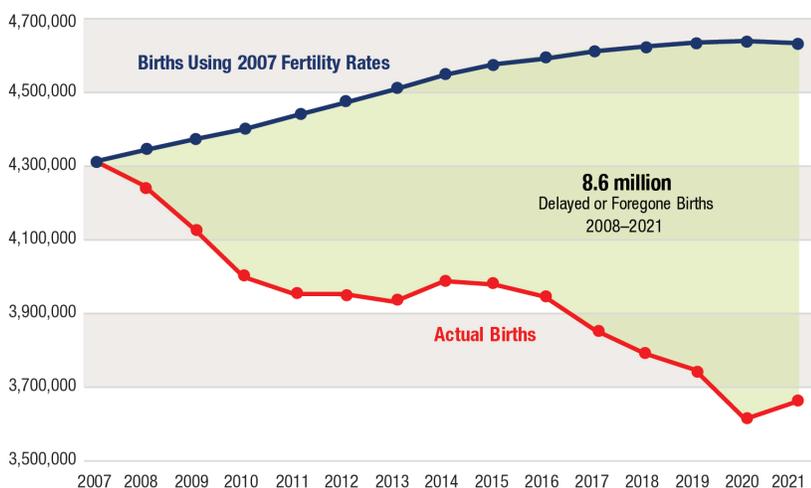
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ACTUAL BIRTHS COMPARED TO BIRTHS USING 2007 FERTILITY RATES, 2008 TO 2021



Source: National Center for Health Statistics, 2021