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## Teen pregnancy rates go back up

**The number of teenage pregnancies in England and Wales has risen slightly, figures show.**

The Office for National Statistics data showed there were 41.9 conceptions per 1,000 15 to 17 year olds in 2007 - up from 40.9 the year before.

It is the first increase since 2002 and means the government will almost certainly miss its target to halve rates by 2010.

The news follows a series of high-profile teenage pregnancy cases.

In total, there were estimated to be just over 42,900 conceptions in under 18s.

The under 16 conception rates also increased from 7.8 per 1,000 to 8.3, meaning there were nearly 8,200 pregnancies.

The levels in Scotland are almost exactly the same as England and Wales, with the drive to reduce them also struggling.

Teenage girls in the North East were the most likely in England to become pregnant, with 52.9 pregnancies per thousand girls aged 15-17.

Hartlepool and Middlesbrough were the towns with the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in the North East, with 66.8 per 1,000 and 66.7 per 1,000 respectively.

Of the 2,598 pregnancies in the North East, 42% led to an abortion - almost 10% lower than the national average.

Pregnancy rates were also high in Yorkshire and Humberside, the West Midlands and the North West, with all recording more than 47 pregnancies per 1,000 girls.

### Failing a generation

Hilary Pannack, of the sex education charity Straight Talking, said: "We are failing a whole generation of young people."

"Teenage parents statistically are much more likely to become parents of children who themselves become teenage parents.

"That means generations of child poverty, which we need desperately to tackle."

Juliet Hillier, of Brook, a sexual health charity for young people, added: "It's disappointing, but not surprising to see an increase.

"It is essential that funding finds its way to local areas where the need is greatest and this is simply not happening consistently."

She also said sex education needed to be improved, adding it was too biological.

However, despite the rise last year, the overall rate has still fallen over the past 10 years. Gill Frances, chairman of the Teenage Pregnancy Independent Advisory Group, said teenage pregnancy was still a challenging issue.

But she added: "There is good news. We've still got an overall fall in teenage pregnancy."



The UK has the highest teenage pregnancy rate in Europe

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But she accepted that progress had not been as swift as has had been hoped.

Ms Hughes said it was important to give parents help and advice about how to tackle the issue of sex in an open fashion with their children.

She said high quality sex education in schools was also vital, and new guidance to make that compulsory would be issued to schools in the autumn.

"This is not just about the mechanics of sex, it is about relationships, moral values and about making clear what is right and wrong and what you expect from young people, but it is doing that in a way that enables them to take part in the dialogue."

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