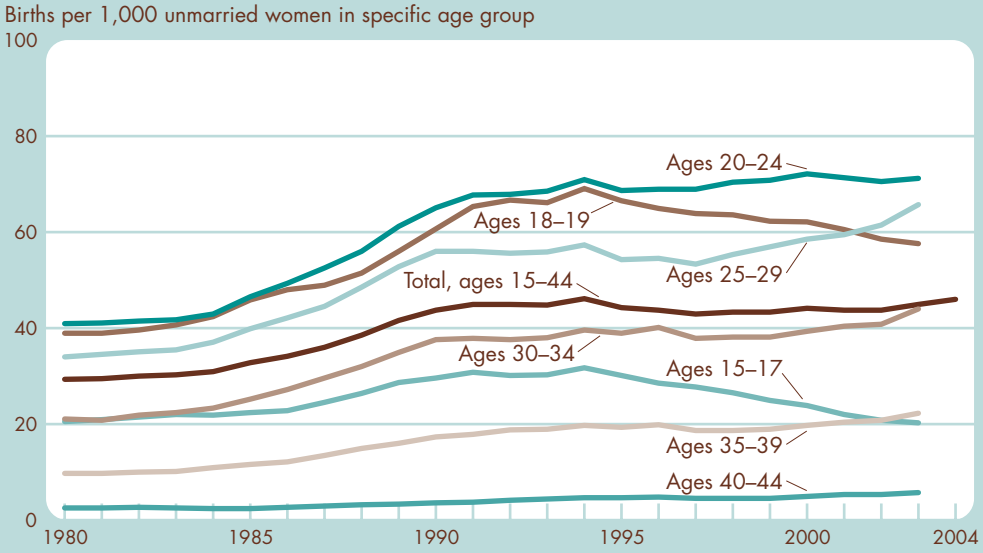
Population and Family Characteristics

In 2004, 73 million children under age 18 lived in the United States, 900,000 more than in 2000. Children under age 18 represented 25 percent of the population in 2004, down from a peak of 36 percent at the end of the baby boom in 1964. The number of children is projected to increase to 80 million and represent 24 percent of the population in 2020.

Living with two parents who are married to each other is associated with more favorable outcomes for children.[1] The proportion of children under age 18 living with two married parents[2] fell from 77 percent in 1980, to 73 percent in 1990, to 69 percent in 2000, and to 67 percent in 2005. Among children under age 18 in 2005, 23 percent lived with only their mothers, 5 percent lived with only their fathers, and 4 percent lived with neither of their parents.

Births to unmarried women constituted 36 percent of all births in 2004, reaching a record high of nearly 1.5 million births. Over half of births to women in their early twenties and nearly 30 percent of births to women ages 25–29 were to unmarried women. Nonmarital births by teenagers accounted for about half of nonmarital births in 1970, but dropped to one-quarter in 2004.

Figure 1 **Birth rates for unmarried women by age of mother, 1980–2004**



NOTE: The 2004 rate for total ages 15–44 is preliminary. 2004 data for specific age groups are not available.
SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System.

Along with the number of births to unmarried women, the birth rate for unmarried women rose in 2004 (Figure 1). The 1994–2002 trend of modest declines in the birth rate for unmarried women for all age groups combined appears to have ended. The 2004 rate of 46 births per 1,000 unmarried women ages 15–44 matches the historic high reported a decade earlier, in 1994. Birth rates for unmarried teenagers have declined steadily since 1994, while rates for unmarried women age 20 and older were higher in 2003 than in 1994.

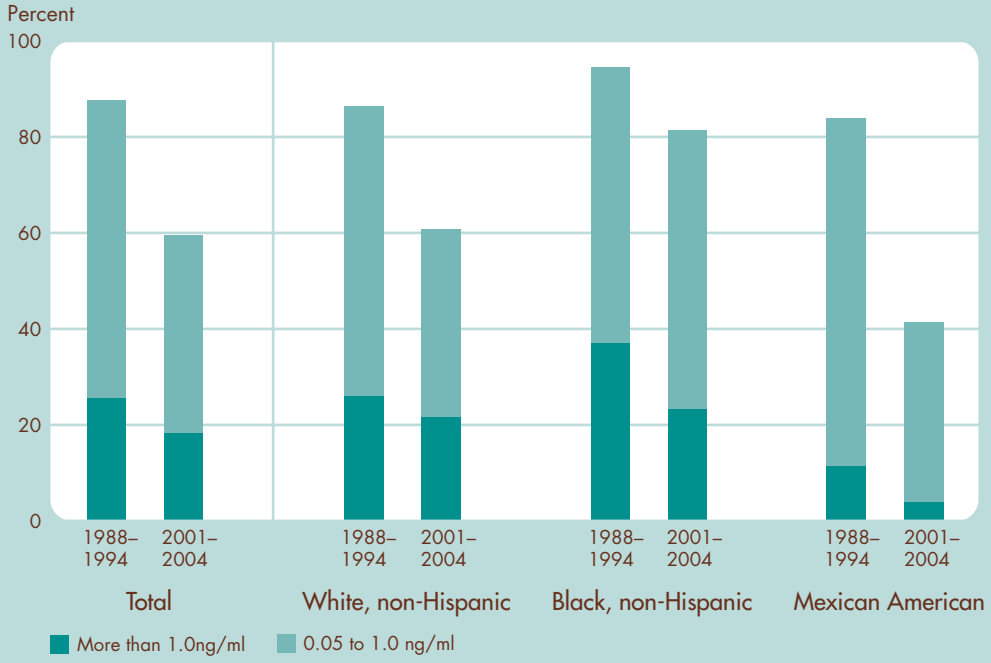
[1] Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. (2005). *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2005*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 63–72.

[2] Parents can be step, biologic, or adoptive.

In 2005, 61 percent of children age 6 and under who were not yet enrolled in kindergarten received some form of nonparental child care on a regular basis, while 39 percent were cared for only by their parents. When including all nonparental care arrangements in 2005 (multiple categories could be chosen), 22 percent of children age 6 and under received care from another relative, 14 percent received care from a nonrelative, and 36 percent received care from a center-based program. In 2005, 47 percent of children in kindergarten through grade 3 had some form of nonparental care on a regular basis before or after school, compared with 53 percent of children in grades 4–8.

The environment in which children live plays a role in their health and development. Environmental tobacco smoke (secondhand smoke) increases the probability of adverse health effects.[3] Cotinine, a breakdown product of nicotine, is a marker for recent (previous 1–2 days) exposure to secondhand smoke. The percentage of children ages 4–11 with blood cotinine levels at or above 0.05 nanograms per milliliter (ng/ml) decreased from 88 percent in 1988–1994 to 59 percent in 2001–2004 (Figure 2). The most recent data show that 61 percent of White, non-Hispanic children had cotinine in their blood, compared with 81 percent of Black, non-Hispanic and 41 percent of Mexican American children.[4]

Figure 2 **Percentage of children ages 4–11 with specified blood cotinine levels by race and Hispanic origin,[4] 1988–1994 and 2001–2004**



NOTE: The cotinine value of 0.05 ng/ml was the limit of detection in 1988–1994. Cotinine levels are reported for nonsmoking children only. The average (geometric mean) blood cotinine level in children living in homes where someone smokes was 1.0 ng/ml in 1988–1994.[5]

SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey.

[3] U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. (1992). *Respiratory health effects of passive smoking: Lung cancer and other disorders*. Washington, DC: EPA Office of Research and Development. Available at http://cfpub.epa.gov/ncea/cfm/ets/etsindex.cfm.

[4] In the 1988–1994 survey, respondents were asked to choose one racial identity. In the 2001–2004 surveys, respondents were asked to choose one or more races; however, only persons reporting one racial identity are shown here. Mexican American children may be of any race.

[5] Mannino, D.M., Caraballo, R., Benowitz, N., and Repace, J. (2001). Predictors of cotinine levels in U.S. children: Data from the Third National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. *CHEST*, *120*, 718–724.