Japan suffers biggest natural population decline ever in 2018

A father holds up his baby under carp streamers fluttering in a riverside park in Sagamihara, suburban Tokyo, on April 29, 2016, ahead of May 5 Children’s Day in Japan.

(CNN) Japan suffered its biggest natural population decline ever this year, government statistics show.

The fast-graying nation also posted a record-low birthrate, as the estimated number of babies born in 2018 dipped to 921,000 -- the lowest since records began in 1899 -- according to a report published Friday by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare. The number of newborns is estimated to have shrunk by 25,000 from 2017, and the figure remains under the 1 million mark for the third year running.

Deaths in 2018 also hit a postwar record high of 1.369 million, with a natural population decline of 448,000 -- the highest ever.
Japan is a "super-aged" nation, meaning more than 20% of its population is older than 65. The country's total population stands at 124 million this year -- but by 2065 it is expected to have dropped to about 88 million.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe wants to prevent the population from dropping below 100 million by 2060. In 2017, the government announced a 2 trillion yen ($18 billion) spending package to expand free preschool for children aged 3 to 5 -- and for children aged 2 and under from low-income families -- and cut waiting times at day care centers.

Source: CNN report