

About 1 out of every 33 babies is born with a major birth defect.

Birth defects cause one in five deaths among infants less than a year old.

Birth defects lead to \$2.5 billion per year in hospital costs alone in the U.S.

Selected birth defects counts and birth prevalence, Alaska and US

Defects	Alaska [†]		US [‡]	
	Annual no. of cases	Birth prevalence*	Annual no. of cases	Birth prevalence*
Central nervous system				
Anencephalus	0	0	1,009	2.51
Spina bifida without anencephalus	4	3.96	1,477	3.68
Cardiovascular				
Transposition of great arteries	5	5.15	1,901	4.73
Tetralogy of Fallot	7	7.13	1,574	3.92
Atrioventricular septal defect (also known as endocardial cushion defect)	5	5.35	1,748	4.36
Hypoplastic left heart syndrome	3	3.37	975	2.43
Orofacial				
Cleft lip with and without cleft palate	16	16.04	4,209	10.47
Cleft palate without cleft lip	15	14.66	2,567	6.39
Musculoskeletal				
Upper limb defect	2	1.58	1,521	3.79
Lower limb defect	4	4.16	763	1.90
Gastroschisis	--	--	1,497	3.73
Chromosomal				
Down syndrome	17	17.23	5,132	12.78

* per 10,000 live births

[†] estimates based on pooled data from birth years 2001-2005

[‡] estimates based on pooled data from birth years 1999-2001

-- No data available

Note: Due to variability in the methods used by state birth defects surveillance systems and differences in populations and risk factors, state prevalence estimates may not be directly comparable with national estimates or those of other states.

Preventing birth defects

- The causes of about 70% of birth defects are unknown.
- Many birth defects happen during early pregnancy, often before a woman knows she is pregnant.
- Addressing health risks and behaviors before pregnancy can reduce the risk of poor birth outcomes, including some birth defects.
- All women who could become pregnant should take 400 micrograms of folic acid every day to help prevent serious defects of the baby's brain and spinal cord.

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Alaska's Birth Defect Surveillance System

Since 1996 the Alaska Birth Defects Registry (ABDR) has monitored the statewide prevalence of birth defects. Alaska uses passive surveillance methodology. Medical providers identify birth defects for children up to the age of six years and report them to the registry. Reportable birth defects in Alaska include all major congenital anomalies as well as fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) for which we routinely conduct case verification studies.

How birth defects data are used in Alaska

The ABDR has monitored over 130,000 births and has information on approximately 30,000 children born with birth defects. Data are used to provide counts and prevalence estimates for birth defects occurring in Alaska. This data is used by agencies statewide to target prevention messages, interventions and health care services; define populations at increased risk for birth defects; and identify clusters of conditions that may be related to environmental exposures. Data is published periodically and is posted on our website.