Birth defects state profile – Pennsylvania

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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, Pennsylvania and US

	Pennsylvania†		US‡	
Defects	Annual no. of cases	Birth prevalence*	Annual no. of cases	Birth prevalence*
Central nervous system				
Anencephalus	--	--	1,009	2.51
Spina bifida without anencephalus	28	3.25	1,477	3.68
Cardiovascular				
Transposition of great arteries	--	--	1,901	4.73
Tetralogy of Fallot	--	--	1,574	3.92
Atrioventricular septal defect (also known as endocardial cushion defect)	--	--	1,748	4.36
Hypoplastic left heart syndrome	--	--	975	2.43
Orofacial				
Cleft lip with and without cleft palate	--	--	4,209	10.47
Cleft palate without cleft lip	--	--	2,567	6.39
Musculoskeletal				
Upper limb defect	--	--	1,521	3.79
Lower limb defect	--	--	763	1.90
Gastroschisis	--	--	1,497	3.73
Chromosomal				
Down syndrome	141	9.79	5,132	12.78

* per 10,000 live births
† estimates based on pooled data from birth years 2001-2003
‡ 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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Pennsylvania's Birth Defect Surveillance System

Pennsylvania currently does not have a birth defects surveillance system in place.

How birth defects data are used in Pennsylvania

The Genetic Services Section supports vendors to provide access to comprehensive genetic services, screening, counseling, and referral services to ensure that eligible, low-income individuals and families seeking information about the occurrence, or risk of occurrence, of a genetic condition or birth defect are provided. Supported vendors include: seven comprehensive genetic screening centers, three major metabolic screening and treatment centers, and four Family Health Councils.