

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 \$2.6 billion per year in hospital costs alone in the U.S.

Selected birth defects counts and birth prevalence, California (8 representative counties) and US

Defects	California (8 counties) [†]		US [‡]	
	Average annual no. of cases	Birth prevalence*	Average annual no. of cases	Birth prevalence*
Central nervous system				
Anencephalus	20	3.07	1,009	2.51
Spina bifida without anencephalus	28	4.27	1,477	3.68
Cardiovascular				
Transposition of great arteries	12	1.90	1,901	4.73
Tetralogy of Fallot	23	3.50	1,574	3.92
Atrioventricular septal defect (also known as endocardial cushion defect)	26	3.99	1,748	4.36
Hypoplastic left heart syndrome	17	2.58	975	2.43
Orofacial				
Cleft lip with and without cleft palate	63	9.73	4,209	10.47
Cleft palate without cleft lip	33	5.00	2,567	6.39
Musculoskeletal				
Upper limb defect	21	3.25	1,521	3.79
Lower limb defect	9	1.32	763	1.90
Gastroschisis	33	5.09	1,497	3.73
Chromosomal				
Down syndrome	90	13.84	5,132	12.78

* per 10,000 live births

[†] estimates based on pooled data from birth years 2002-2006

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

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.

California's Birth Defect Surveillance System

The California Birth Defects Monitoring Program (CBDMP) has been an active ascertainment, population based registry since 1982. Data collection and reporting procedures—reflecting 25 years of experience—ensure that data are accurate, comprehensive, consistent and useful. CBDMP currently monitors a subset, over 40% (n=225,000) of annual births in California, which represents the state's geographic, environmental and racial/ethnic diversity. For consistency, data for this report is drawn from a subset of core counties, with ~70,000 births annually, which have been monitored for over 20 years. To maximize the registry's effectiveness, CBDMP focuses on gathering complete data on conditions with medical and public health impact.

How birth defects data are used in California

The CBDMP registry data are used for ongoing surveillance to monitor rates and trends of select birth defects and to provide outcome data for the pregnancy blood samples included in the CBDMP serum bank. Registry data are used to evaluate public health programs such as the Title V state performance measure and to address public concerns about birth defects and the environment. Registry data are used to support birth defects research that includes multiple epidemiologic approaches.

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