

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, Puerto Rico and US**

Defects	Puerto Rico		US <sup>†</sup>	
	Average annual no. of cases	Birth prevalence*	Average annual no. of cases	Birth prevalence*
<b>Central nervous system</b>				
Anencephalus	16 <sup>†</sup>	3.18	1,009	2.51
Spina bifida without anencephalus	20 <sup>†</sup>	3.85	1,477	3.68
<b>Cardiovascular</b>				
Transposition of great arteries	14 <sup>§</sup>	2.73	1,901	4.73
Tetralogy of Fallot	19 <sup>§</sup>	3.72	1,574	3.92
Atrioventricular septal defect (also known as endocardial cushion defect)	19 <sup>§</sup>	3.77	1,748	4.36
Hypoplastic left heart syndrome	11 <sup>§</sup>	2.13	975	2.43
<b>Orofacial</b>				
Cleft lip with and without cleft palate	44 <sup>†</sup>	8.73	4,209	10.47
Cleft palate without cleft lip	30 <sup>†</sup>	5.94	2,567	6.39
<b>Musculoskeletal</b>				
Upper limb defect	10 <sup>†</sup>	1.97	1,521	3.79
Lower limb defect	7 <sup>†</sup>	1.38	763	1.90
Gastroschisis	19 <sup>†</sup>	3.74	1,497	3.73
<b>Chromosomal</b>				
Down syndrome	65 <sup>†</sup>	12.78	5,132	12.78

\* per 10,000 live births

<sup>†</sup> estimates based on pooled data from birth years 2002-2006

<sup>§</sup> estimates based on pooled data from birth years 2003-2006

<sup>‡</sup> 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.

**Puerto Rico's Birth Defect Surveillance System**

The Puerto Rico Birth Defects Surveillance System (BDSS) was established in 1995. It is an active, population based, surveillance system for 44 birth defects. The program has a current legislation enacted in September 2004. The BDSS also has a Birth Defects Prevention Campaign which also partners with other Agencies to promote birth defects prevention messages Island wide.

**Program information:**

Diana Valencia, MSc.  
 Puerto Rico Birth Defects Surveillance System  
 E-mail: [dvalencia@salud.gov.pr](mailto:dvalencia@salud.gov.pr)

Laureane Alvelo-Maldonado, MSc.  
 Puerto Rico Birth Defects Surveillance System  
 E-mail: [lalvelo@salud.gov.pr](mailto:lalvelo@salud.gov.pr)

We site: <http://www.salud.gov.pr>

**How birth defects data are used in Puerto Rico**

BDSS data is monitored to identify time trends, and to detect changes in the occurrence of birth defects. An annual basis data book is prepared and distributed to health professionals interested in the field. The BDSS provides referrals to programs and health services for at risk children. These data also serve to evaluate the impact of the Birth Defects Prevention Campaign.