In the United States, 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, Washington and US

| Defects | Washington[†] | | US[‡] | |
	Average annual no. of cases	Birth prevalence*	Average annual no. of cases	Birth prevalence*
Central nervous system				
Anencephalus	5	0.65	859	2.1
Spina bifida without anencephalus	17	2.12	1,460	3.5
Cardiovascular				
Transposition of great arteries	--	--	1,252	3.0
Tetralogy of Fallot	--	--	1,657	4.0
Atrioventricular septal defect (also known as endocardial cushion defect)	--	--	1,966	4.7
Hypoplastic left heart syndrome	--	--	960	2.3
Orofacial				
Cleft lip with and without cleft palate	91	11.11	4,437	10.6
Cleft palate without cleft lip	47	5.80	2,651	6.4
Musculoskeletal				
Upper limb defect	16	1.92	1,454	3.5
Lower limb defect	9	1.14	701	1.7
Gastroschisis**	45	5.25	1,871	4.5
Chromosomal				
Down syndrome	107	13.07	6,037	14.5

* per 10,000 live births
[†] estimates based on pooled data from birth years 2003-2005 (passive case ascertainment)
** estimates based on pooled data from birth years 2005-2006 (active case ascertainment)
[‡] estimates based on pooled data from birth years 2004-2006
-- 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.

Washington's Birth Defect Surveillance System
The Washington State Birth Defects Surveillance System (BDSS) began in 1986 as a state-wide active surveillance system. Since 1992, the system has been a passive surveillance system that relies on hospitals to report cases of children with birth defects. The BDSS currently monitors the prevalence of nine conditions: anencephaly, spina bifida, cleft lip with and without cleft palate, cleft palate alone, hypospadias/epispadias, limb reduction defects, gastroschisis, omphalocele, and Down syndrome.

How birth defects data are used in Washington
An estimated 2500 to 3400 children are born with birth defects in Washington each year. The Washington BDSS monitors the magnitude and trends in birth defects over time. The data are used to evaluate unusual occurrences in reported birth defects and have been utilized in recent birth defect cluster investigations. The BDSS also works with other programs to increase the awareness of birth defects in Washington State.