

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, Virginia and US

Defects	Virginia [†]		US [‡]	
	Annual no. of cases	Birth prevalence*	Annual no. of cases	Birth prevalence*
Central nervous system				
Anencephalus	3	0.34	1,009	2.51
Spina bifida without anencephalus	40	3.95	1,477	3.68
Cardiovascular				
Transposition of great arteries	50	4.93	1,901	4.73
Tetralogy of Fallot	51	4.99	1,574	3.92
Atrioventricular septal defect (also known as endocardial cushion defect)	42	4.11	1,748	4.36
Hypoplastic left heart syndrome	26	2.53	975	2.43
Orofacial				
Cleft lip with and without cleft palate	104	10.26	4,209	10.47
Cleft palate without cleft lip	76	7.54	2,567	6.39
Musculoskeletal				
Upper limb defect	18	1.80	1,521	3.79
Lower limb defect	13	1.32	763	1.90
Gastroschisis	--	--	1,497	3.73
Chromosomal				
Down syndrome	120	11.86	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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Virginia's Birth Defect Surveillance System

Virginia Congenital Anomaly Reporting and Education System (VaCARES) has collected state-wide birth defect data since 1987. VaCARES is a web-based system that identifies more than 4,000 Virginia infants born with birth defects each year. In addition to birth defect data collected from birthing, pediatric and tertiary care hospitals, VaCARES also ascertains cases from the 3 regional genetic centers. System improvements scheduled for completion in calendar year 2009 will support VaCARES within the same system as the Electronic Birth Certificate. This linkage ensures more comprehensive reporting of affected children.

How birth defects data are used in Virginia

Data is used to provide routine statistical monitoring, public health program evaluation, baseline rates, rates by demographic and other variables, as well as other data related activities. VaCARES data is also used to provide families with defect specific educational material and service related resource information for children and families affected by birth defects.