

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, 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	2.9	859	2.1
Spina bifida without anencephalus	27	3.9	1,460	3.5
Cardiovascular				
Transposition of great arteries	13	1.9	1,252	3.0
Tetralogy of Fallot	24	3.5	1,657	4.0
Atrioventricular septal defect (also known as endocardial cushion defect)	33	4.8	1,966	4.7
Hypoplastic left heart syndrome	19	2.8	960	2.3
Orofacial				
Cleft lip with and without cleft palate	69	10.0	4,437	10.6
Cleft palate without cleft lip	37	5.4	2,651	6.4
Musculoskeletal				
Upper limb defect	21	3.1	1,454	3.5
Lower limb defect	10	1.5	701	1.7
Gastroschisis	37	5.4	1,871	4.5
Chromosomal				
Down syndrome	97	14.1	6,037	14.5

* per 10,000 live births

[†] estimates based on pooled data from birth years 2004-2008

[‡] estimates based on pooled data from birth years 2004-2006

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 1983. Data collection and reporting procedures—reflecting over 25 years of experience—ensure that data are accurate, comprehensive, consistent and useful. CBDMP currently monitors a subset (n=180,000) of annual births in California. 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. 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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