

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, Maine and US

Defects	Maine ⁺		US [‡]	
	Annual no. of cases	Birth prevalence*	Annual no. of cases	Birth prevalence*
Central nervous system				
Anencephalus	1.6	1.2	859	2.1
Spina bifida without anencephalus	4.8	3.5	1,460	3.5
Cardiovascular				
Transposition of great arteries	7.4	5.4	1,252	3.0
Tetralogy of Fallot	4.6	3.4	1,657	4.0
Atrioventricular septal defect	--	--	1,966	4.7
Hypoplastic left heart syndrome	4	2.9	960	2.3
Orofacial				
Cleft lip with and without cleft palate	11.8	8.6	4,437	10.6
Cleft palate without cleft lip	12.4	9.1	2,651	6.4
Musculoskeletal				
Upper limb defect	0	0.0	1,454	3.5
Lower limb defect	<1	0.1	701	1.7
Gastroschisis	7.8	5.7	1,871	4.5
Chromosomal				
Down syndrome	17.6	12.9	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

-- 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 prevent serious defects of the baby’s brain and spinal cord.

Maine’s Birth Defect Surveillance System

The Maine Birth Defects Program was established in 1999. Rules were officially adopted in April 2003 at which time data collection began. The Maine Birth Defects Program is currently collecting data on 22 birth defects which include major heart defects, cleft lip, palate and lip and palate, reduction deformities of upper and lower limbs, hypospadias and down syndrome. The program is working on expanding follow-up with families.

How birth defects data are used in Maine

Maine Birth Defects Program uses the data collected to assess the full impact of birth defects on Maine children and their families, to improve access to specialty services for families and locate resources for emotional and economic support, to monitor trends related to the prevalence of selected birth defects in Maine and to educate provider and the general public on prevention strategies to decrease the incidence of birth defects in Maine.

Program information:

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http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/boh/cshn/birth_defects/index.html