

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, New Jersey and US

Defects	New Jersey [†]		US [‡]	
	Average annual no. of cases	Birth prevalence*	Average annual no. of cases	Birth prevalence*
Central nervous system				
Anencephalus	4	0.3	859	2.1
Spina bifida without anencephalus	28	2.4	1,460	3.5
Cardiovascular				
Transposition of great arteries	36	3.1	1,252	3.0
Tetralogy of Fallot	41	3.6	1,657	4.0
Atrioventricular septal defect (also known as endocardial cushion defect)	32	2.7	1,966	4.7
Hypoplastic left heart syndrome	19	1.6	960	2.3
Orofacial				
Cleft lip with and without cleft palate	82	7.1	4,437	10.6
Cleft palate without cleft lip	70	6.0	2,651	6.4
Musculoskeletal				
Upper limb defect	32	2.8	1,454	3.5
Lower limb defect	22	1.9	701	1.7
Gastroschisis	25	2.1	1,871	4.5
Chromosomal				
Down syndrome	123	10.8	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.

New Jersey’s Birth Defect Surveillance System

This is the oldest such program in the country. Since 1928, the New Jersey Special Child Health Services (SCHS) Registry has registered children having birth defects and other special needs conditions. State law requires the reporting of children diagnosed with congenital defects through age five to the SCHS Registry. The Registry has confidential records of all birth defects that occur in New Jersey in order to conduct thorough and complete epidemiologic surveys of birth defects and to plan for and provide services to children with birth defects and their families.

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How birth defects data are used in New Jersey

New Jersey has monitored nearly 3 million births since 1985 and has information on over 200,000 children either born with birth defects or diagnosed with special needs conditions. SCHS data are used to report incidence of birth defects in New Jersey. The New Jersey SCHS Registry serves as a national model for linking registered children and their families to various services. Families are directly linked with local county-based case management units; coordination includes health, educational, financial, and social services.