

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, Wisconsin and US

| Defects | Wisconsin [†] | | US [‡] | |
|---|-----------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| | Average annual no. of cases | Birth prevalence* | Average annual no. of cases | Birth prevalence* |
| Central nervous system | | | | |
| Anencephalus | 10 | 1.5 | 859 | 2.1 |
| Spina bifida without anencephalus | 20 | 2.9 | 1,460 | 3.5 |
| Cardiovascular | | | | |
| Transposition of great arteries | 12 | 1.7 | 1,252 | 3.0 |
| Tetralogy of Fallot | 14 | 2.1 | 1,657 | 4.0 |
| Atrioventricular septal defect (also known as endocardial cushion defect) | 11 | 1.6 | 1,966 | 4.7 |
| Hypoplastic left heart syndrome | 11 | 1.6 | 960 | 2.3 |
| Orofacial | | | | |
| Cleft lip with and without cleft palate | 65 | 9.6 | 4,437 | 10.6 |
| Cleft palate without cleft lip | 40 | 6.0 | 2,651 | 6.4 |
| Musculoskeletal | | | | |
| Upper limb defect | 18 | 2.7 | 1,454 | 3.5 |
| Lower limb defect | 7 | 1.0 | 701 | 1.7 |
| Gastroschisis | 46 | 6.8 | 1,871 | 4.5 |
| Chromosomal | | | | |
| Down syndrome | 88 | 13.0 | 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.

Wisconsin’s Birth Defect Surveillance System

Wisconsin has operated a passive registry, the Wisconsin Birth Defects Registry (WBDR), housed in the Maternal and Child Health section in the Division of Public Health, since 2003 following passage of legislation and administrative rules requiring the establishment of a registry and an advisory council. The WBDR is a secure web-based system that allows for both entry of an individual report and uploading of multiple reports from an electronic patient records system. The WBDR also accepts paper reports. Wisconsin leads one or more prevention projects each year and partially funds a stillbirth project that reports identified birth defects to the WBDR.

How birth defects data are used in Wisconsin

Wisconsin has about 69,000 births a year. Birth certificate data is used for comparison purposes and for outreach to underreporting areas. Researchers also request and receive WBDR data for research purposes most recently on gastroschisis. Five Regional Centers for CYSHCN use birth defects data for outreach to families and referral and follow-up activities.

Program information:

Elizabeth Oftedahl, MPH
 Wisconsin Birth Defects Registry
 E-mail: Elizabeth.Oftedahl@dhs.wisconsin.gov

Peggy Helm-Quest, MEd, MHA, CHES
 Wisconsin Birth Defects Registry
 E-mail: Peggy.HelmQuest@dhs.wisconsin.gov

Website: <https://phin.wisconsin.gov/wbdr/index.html>