

Low Birthweight Infants

DEFINITION

Low birthweight infants is the percentage of infants born weighing under 2,500 grams (5.5 pounds). The data are reported by place of mother's residence, not place of infant's birth.

SIGNIFICANCE

A baby's birthweight is a key indicator of newborn health and is directly related to infant survival and healthy development. Infants born weighing less than 5.5 pounds are at greater risk for physical and developmental problems than infants of normal weight.^{1,2} Babies are born with low birthweight for two reasons: some are born prematurely and others are small for their gestational age.³ Increased risk of low birthweight is strongly associated with poverty, maternal smoking and low levels of educational attainment.⁴

Low birthweight babies are at higher risk of death or long-term illness and disability than infants of normal birthweight.⁵ They are 24 times more likely than babies of normal weight to die within the first year of life.⁶ Children ages 6 to 15 years old who were born low birthweight are 50% more likely than children of normal birthweight to be enrolled in a special education program.⁷

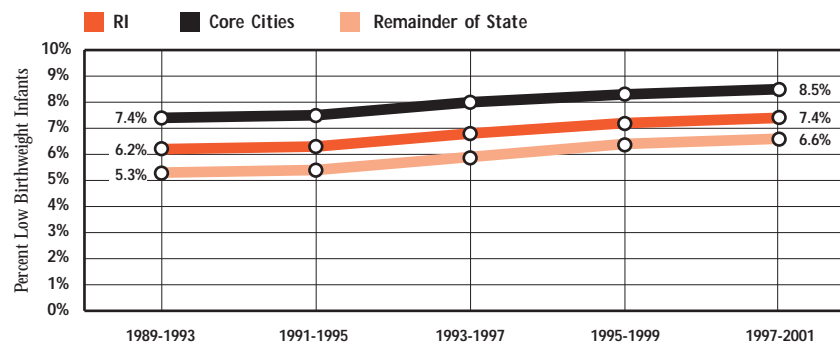
At almost all educational levels, socioeconomic levels, and age categories, Black mothers are at greater risk for having a preterm delivery and a low birthweight infant.^{8,9} These disparities are not entirely explained by differences in income or health behaviors.¹⁰ In Rhode Island between 1997 and 2001, the incidence of low birthweight in Black infants was nearly double the rate in White infants and was higher than all other racial/ethnic groups.¹¹

Low Birthweight Infants		
	1990	2000
RI	6.2%	7.2%
US	7.0%	7.6%
State Rank	21st	

1st is best; 50th is worst

Source: *The Right Start for America's Newborns: A Decade of City and State Trends (1990-2000)* (2002). Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Low Birthweight Infants, Rhode Island, Core Cities and the Remainder of the State, 1989-2001



Source: Rhode Island Department of Health, Division of Family Health, Maternal and Child Health Database, 1989-1993, 1991-1995, 1993-1997, 1995-1999 and 1997-2001. Data for 1999-2001 are provisional.

◆ Over the past decade, the percentage of infants born low birthweight has increased in Rhode Island, the core cities and the remainder of the state. This increase has occurred across all racial and ethnic groups.¹²

◆ One reason for the increase in low birthweight infants is the growing numbers of twin, triplet and higher-order multiple births. Twins and other multiple births are more likely to be low birthweight than single births.¹³ From 1997 to 2001, 6% of single births were born low birthweight, compared to 52% of twin births and 96% of triplets and higher-order multiple births in Rhode Island.¹⁴

Table 15. Low Birthweight Infants, Rhode Island, 1997-2001

CITY/TOWN	# BIRTHS	# LOW BIRTHWEIGHT	% LOW BIRTHWEIGHT
Barrington	820	38	4.6%
Bristol	1,067	72	6.7%
Burrillville	781	59	7.6%
Central Falls	1,781	150	8.4%
Charlestown	446	26	NA
Coventry	1,924	122	6.3%
Cranston	4,171	288	6.9%
Cumberland	1,701	124	7.3%
East Greenwich	588	32	5.4%
East Providence	2,499	161	6.4%
Exeter	341	15	NA
Foster	197	11	NA
Glocester	464	25	NA
Hopkinton	488	46	NA
Jamestown	205	11	NA
Johnston	1,492	118	7.9%
Lincoln	990	63	6.4%
Little Compton	156	12	NA
Middletown	1,083	46	4.2%
Narragansett	667	48	7.2%
New Shoreham	57	2	NA
Newport	1,645	100	6.1%
North Kingstown	1,500	76	5.1%
North Providence	1,576	129	8.2%
North Smithfield	515	41	8.0%
Pawtucket	5,030	393	7.8%
Portsmouth	917	57	6.2%
Providence	13,589	1,235	9.1%
Richmond	472	22	NA
Scituate	504	32	6.3%
Smithfield	805	48	6.0%
South Kingstown	1,298	71	5.5%
Tiverton	649	29	4.5%
Warren	582	49	8.4%
Warwick	4,427	342	7.7%
West Greenwich	297	10	NA
West Warwick	2,024	152	7.5%
Westerly	1,373	79	5.8%
Woonsocket	2,980	240	8.1%
Unknown	9	0	NA
Core Cities 2000	27,049	2,270	8.4%
Remainder of State	35,061	2,304	6.6%
Rhode Island	62,110	4,574	7.4%

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Health, Division of Family Health, Maternal and Child Health Database, 1997-2001. Data for 1999-2001 are provisional.

Core Cities are Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, West Warwick and Woonsocket.

NA: Percentages were not calculated for cities and towns with less than 500 births, as percentages for small denominators are statistically unreliable.

The denominator is the total number of live births to Rhode Island residents from 1997-2001.

References for Indicator

^{1,6} *KIDS COUNT Data Book: State Profiles of Child Well-Being* (2002). Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

² *Maternal, Infant and Child Health in the United States (2001)*. Washington, DC: March of Dimes

^{3,5,8,13} *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being 2002* (2002). Washington, DC: Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics.

⁴ *Child Health USA 2002* (2002). Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Maternal and Child Health Bureau.

⁷ Lewit, E., et al. (1995). "The Direct Cost of Low Birth Weight" in *The Future of Children: Low Birthweight*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Spring 1995). Los Altos, CA: The Center for the Future of Children, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

^{9,10} Shore, R. (2002). *KIDS COUNT Indicator Brief: Preventing Low Birthweight (Draft)*. Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

^{11,12,14} Rhode Island Department of Health, Division of Family Health, Maternal and Child Health Database, 1997-2001. Data for 1999-2001 are provisional.