

# Infants Born at Risk

## DEFINITION

*Infants born at risk* is the number of babies born in Rhode Island to Rhode Island women who were low-income, single, did not have a high school diploma, and/or were under age 20.

## SIGNIFICANCE

The basic architecture of the human brain develops during the infant and toddler years. By age three, a child's brain has grown to 80% of its adult size and the foundation of many cognitive structures and systems are in place. Early experiences lay the foundation for future learning, and strong, positive relationships are the building blocks for healthy development. Babies who have positive early childhood experiences and stable, loving relationships with parents and other caregivers have a sturdy foundation to achieve healthy growth and development, while babies who go without often encounter educational, social-emotional, health, and developmental challenges.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

Infancy is a time of great opportunity and vulnerability. A child's development can be compromised by "toxic stress" caused by a variety of adverse childhood experiences and risk factors, including poverty, maternal depression, family chaos, exposure to violence, child maltreatment, parental substance abuse, and/or parental incarceration. These negative experiences in early childhood

place a child at increased risk for developmental delays, health problems, cognitive impairment, lowered rates of school success, and unhealthy behaviors throughout life.<sup>4,5,6</sup>

Economic hardship and racial disparities in early childhood are associated with poor outcomes. Differences in development are evident by age two, with children born into low-income families lagging behind children born into higher income families. When economic insecurity is combined with other factors such as having a single parent, a parent with low education levels, and living in racially segregated or under resourced neighborhoods, children are at an increased risk for poor outcomes. In the U.S., 44% of all infants and toddlers live in low-income families (below 200% of the federal poverty line) and 21% live in poverty, a significantly higher proportion than older children and adults. Children under age three are more than twice as likely to live in poverty than adults age 65 or older.<sup>7,8,9</sup>

Family planning programs help individuals avoid unintended pregnancies which are associated with negative educational, health, and economic outcomes for women and children.<sup>10</sup> In addition, evidence-based home visiting programs for vulnerable families help parents develop critical nurturing skills and improve outcomes for children and families.<sup>11</sup>



## Births by Key Risk Factors, Four Core Cities and Rhode Island, 2019

CITY/TOWN	BIRTHS	# TO LOW-INCOME MOTHERS	# TO SINGLE MOTHERS	# TO MOTHERS WITHOUT A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA	# TO MOTHERS YOUNGER THAN 20
Central Falls	291	247	190	95	22
Pawtucket	820	527	479	116	40
Providence	2,292	1,712	1,364	495	134
Woonsocket	492	367	324	105	27
<i>Rhode Island</i>	<i>9,614</i>	<i>4,837</i>	<i>4,350</i>	<i>1,092</i>	<i>335</i>

Source: Rhode Island Department of Health, KIDSNET Database, 2019.

- ◆ The U.S. birth rate reached a record low in 2018. The U.S. teen birth rate also reached a historic low in 2018. Rhode Island had the fifth lowest overall birth rate and the eighth lowest teen birth rate in the U.S. in 2018, with 9.9 births per 1,000 women ages 15 to 44 and 11.5 births per 1,000 teens ages 15 to 19.<sup>12</sup>
- ◆ The total number of babies born in Rhode Island to Rhode Island women declined 13.5% between 2009 and 2019, from 11,115 to 9,614 births. The proportion of Rhode Island births that were to mothers without a high school diploma fell from 16% to 11% and the proportion of all births that were to teen mothers fell from 9% to 3% of all births during the same time period.<sup>13</sup>
- ◆ All babies born in Rhode Island are screened through the Rhode Island Department of Health's Newborn Risk Assessment Program. In 2019, there were 6,174 newborns (64%) who "screened positive," indicating the presence of one or more risk factors associated with poor developmental outcomes.<sup>14</sup>
- ◆ Of the 9,614 babies born in Rhode Island to Rhode Island women in 2019, more than one-third (3,318) had a mother with a documented history of treatment for mental health conditions. Also, 639 (7%) had a mother with a documented history of substance abuse problems, and 216 (2%) had a mother with documented involvement in the child welfare system (either as an adult or as a child).<sup>15</sup>

Table 16.

## Infants Born at Risk, Rhode Island, 2019

CITY/TOWN	TOTAL # OF BIRTHS	# OF BIRTHS TO LOW-INCOME FAMILIES	# OF BIRTHS TO SINGLE MOTHERS	BIRTHS TO MOTHERS WITHOUT A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA	# OF BIRTHS TO MOTHERS YOUNGER THAN AGE 20
Barrington	107	14	16	1	0
Bristol	119	37	39	7	*
Burrillville	101	41	41	3	*
Central Falls	291	247	190	95	22
Charlestown	44	17	17	2	0
Coventry	295	83	89	9	9
Cranston	753	332	321	54	22
Cumberland	286	80	70	10	*
East Greenwich	123	16	12	3	*
East Providence	413	184	174	27	9
Exeter	49	16	18	5	*
Foster	40	12	12	2	*
Glocester	60	17	22	0	0
Hopkinton	58	19	25	3	*
Jamestown	26	1	6	0	0
Johnston	257	106	111	10	5
Lincoln	163	42	49	5	*
Little Compton	8	3	1	0	0
Middletown	145	46	43	12	*
Narragansett	45	15	13	1	0
New Shoreham	6	5	1	0	0
Newport	218	96	98	25	11
North Kingstown	219	56	59	13	*
North Providence	312	152	122	18	13
North Smithfield	69	11	18	3	*
Pawtucket	820	527	479	116	40
Portsmouth	103	22	26	3	*
Providence	2292	1712	1364	495	134
Richmond	59	16	16	3	0
Scituate	90	17	28	2	*
Smithfield	127	28	37	0	*
South Kingstown	171	46	38	5	*
Tiverton	57	19	16	1	*
Warren	61	23	21	4	*
Warwick	678	206	247	19	9
West Greenwich	43	9	5	3	0
West Warwick	284	146	144	17	*
Westerly	130	51	38	11	*
Woonsocket	492	367	324	105	27
Four Core Cities	3,895	2,853	2,357	811	223
Remainder of State	5,719	1,984	1,993	281	112
Rhode Island	9,614	4,837	4,350	1,092	335

### Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Health, KIDSNET Database, 2019. Birth data from 2019 are provisional. Data include only births that occurred in Rhode Island to Rhode Island residents. This table shows the number of births with key risk factors that place a child at high risk for poor developmental outcomes. Births to low-income women are births to women with public health insurance (Medicaid/RIteCare) or no insurance. Of the 4,837 births to low-income families in 2019, 4,810 had Medicaid/RIte Care coverage and 27 had no insurance.

\* Data for cities and towns with fewer than five births to mothers younger than age 20 are suppressed by the RI Department of Health due to the policy regarding sensitive reproductive health information of a potentially socially-stigmatizing age group. These births are still counted in the four core cities, remainder of state, and state totals.

The definition for this indicator changed in 2016. The percentage of births with specific risk factors (births to women under age 20, single, and without a high school diploma) and the number and percentage of all births with all three risk factors is no longer being reported.

Core cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

### References

- <sup>1</sup> *The basics of infant and early childhood mental health: A briefing paper.* (2017). Washington, DC: Zero to Three.
- <sup>2</sup> First Things First. (n.d.). *Brain development.* Retrieved February 18, 2020, from [www.firstthingsfirst.org](http://www.firstthingsfirst.org)
- <sup>3,7</sup> *State of babies yearbook 2019.* (2019). Washington, DC: Zero to Three.
- <sup>4</sup> *Toxic stress.* (2020.) Cambridge, MA: Harvard Center on the Developing Child.
- <sup>5</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2019). *Preventing adverse childhood experiences.* Retrieved February 18, 2020, from [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- <sup>6</sup> *Traumatic experiences widespread among U.S. youth, new data show.* (2017). Washington, DC: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

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