

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.^{1,2,3}

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.^{4,5,6}

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 ages 65 or older.^{7,8,9}

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



Births by Key Risk Factors, Four Core Cities and Rhode Island, 2020

CITY/TOWN	BIRTHS	# TO LOW-INCOME MOTHERS	# TO SINGLE MOTHERS	# TO MOTHERS WITHOUT A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA	# TO MOTHERS YOUNGER THAN 20
Central Falls	299	253	200	107	27
Pawtucket	830	556	492	118	28
Providence	2,264	1,672	1,310	529	130
Woonsocket	463	326	303	103	27
<i>Rhode Island</i>	<i>9,590</i>	<i>4,742</i>	<i>4,217</i>	<i>1,143</i>	<i>318</i>

Source: Rhode Island Department of Health, KIDSNET Database, 2020.

- ◆ The U.S. birth rate reached a record low in 2019. The U.S. teen birth rate also reached a historic low in 2019. Rhode Island had the fourth lowest overall birth rate and the sixth lowest teen birth rate in the U.S. in 2019, with 9.6 births per 1,000 women ages 15 to 44 and 10 births per 1,000 teen girls ages 15 to 19.¹²
- ◆ The total number of babies born in Rhode Island to Rhode Island women declined 12% between 2010 and 2020, from 10,839 to 9,590 births. The proportion of Rhode Island births that were to mothers without a high school diploma fell from 15% to 12% and the proportion of all births that were to teen mothers fell from 8% to 3% of all births during the same time period.¹³
- ◆ All babies born in Rhode Island are screened through the Rhode Island Department of Health's Newborn Risk Assessment Program. In 2020, there were 6,233 newborns (65%) who "screened positive," indicating the presence of one or more risk factors associated with poor developmental outcomes.¹⁴
- ◆ Of the 9,590 babies born in Rhode Island to Rhode Island women in 2020, nearly one-third (3,524) had a mother with a documented history of treatment for mental health conditions. Also, 764 (8%) had a mother with a documented history of substance abuse problems, and 220 (2%) had a mother with documented involvement in the child welfare system (either as an adult or as a child).¹⁵

Table 16.

Infants Born at Risk, Rhode Island, 2020

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	103	12	11	1	*
Bristol	137	46	47	6	*
Burrillville	123	37	51	5	*
Central Falls	299	253	200	107	27
Charlestown	52	15	17	1	0
Coventry	275	74	81	10	*
Cranston	729	331	286	59	22
Cumberland	287	65	67	9	*
East Greenwich	130	16	18	1	0
East Providence	401	157	156	25	11
Exeter	49	15	16	1	0
Foster	38	10	11	1	0
Glocester	57	14	20	0	0
Hopkinton	66	20	16	0	*
Jamestown	29	7	7	1	0
Johnston	251	96	97	17	*
Lincoln	185	57	57	6	*
Little Compton	11	4	4	0	0
Middletown	152	47	46	10	*
Narragansett	44	15	14	0	0
New Shoreham	7	3	2	0	0
Newport	199	106	91	32	8
North Kingstown	204	46	43	6	*
North Providence	308	141	123	23	5
North Smithfield	97	24	28	1	0
Pawtucket	830	556	492	118	28
Portsmouth	115	26	27	0	0
Providence	2,264	1,672	1,310	529	130
Richmond	51	13	15	0	0
Scituate	83	17	22	5	*
Smithfield	148	36	30	5	*
South Kingstown	152	33	34	3	0
Tiverton	83	32	30	4	*
Warren	73	33	30	5	*
Warwick	649	196	223	18	13
West Greenwich	41	13	15	1	*
West Warwick	258	126	128	28	14
Westerly	146	51	48	2	5
Woonsocket	463	326	303	103	27
Unknown	1	1	1	0	0
Four Core Cities	3,856	2,807	2,305	857	212
Remainder of State	5,734	1,935	1,912	286	106
Rhode Island	9,590	4,742	4,217	1,143	318

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Health, KIDSNET Database, 2020. Birth data from 2020 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 4,742 births to low-income families in 2020, 4,724 had Medicaid/RIte Care coverage and 18 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

- ¹ *The basics of infant and early childhood mental health: A briefing paper.* (2017). Washington, DC: Zero to Three.
- ² First Things First. (n.d.). *Brain development.* Retrieved April 12, 2021, from www.firstthingsfirst.org
- ^{3,7} *State of babies yearbook 2029.* (2019). Washington, DC: Zero to Three.
- ⁴ *Toxic stress.* (2020.) Cambridge, MA: Harvard Center on the Developing Child.
- ⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2019). *Preventing adverse childhood experiences.* Retrieved April 12, 2021, from www.cdc.gov
- ⁶ *Traumatic experiences widespread among U.S. youth, new data show.* (2017). Washington, DC: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

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