

Disparities in Infant Mortality

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Nearly 28,000 infants died before their first birthday in 2000—an infant mortality rate of 6.9 per 1000 live births. The U.S. infant mortality rate is higher than that in 27 other nations—more than twice as both Hong Kong and Sweden.¹

Infant mortality rates vary based on race and ethnicity

■ The 2000 infant mortality rate per 1000 live births for babies born to:¹

African Americans was 13.6.
 Native Americans was 8.2.
 Hispanics was 5.6.
 Asian/Pacific Islanders was 4.8.
 Whites was 5.7.

■ **African-Americans.** African-American infants are more than twice as likely to die before their first birthday as white infants.¹ In addition, African-American infant mortality rates are increasing.⁴ The rate of SIDS among African-Americans is twice that of whites.³

■ **Hispanics.** Overall, Hispanic infants do not have higher mortality rates than other groups.⁶ But this rate does not reflect the diversity within this group—the Puerto Rican infant mortality rate was 7.8 per 1,000 live births in 1998.⁴

■ **American Indians/Alaska Natives.** American Indians and Alaska Natives have an infant death rate almost double that for whites.² American Indians and Alaska Natives experience high rates of SIDS and fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS).⁴

■ **Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.** Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander infant mortality rates are 31 percent greater than that of whites.³

■ **Asians.** Asians have a lower infant mortality rate than whites, but the highest rate of infant deaths from birth defects.³

Causes of infant mortality vary based on

race and ethnicity: Prematurity/low birth weight is the leading cause of death in the first month of life. Birth defects are the leading cause of death in the first year of life.¹

■ **African-Americans.** The rate of deaths due to prematurity/low birthweight for black infants was nearly four times that for white ones.¹

■ **Hispanics.** Hispanics/Latinos, in particular Puerto Ricans, exhibit a high rate of central nervous system anomalies, which include spina bifida, anen-

cephaly, and congenital hydrocephalus.⁴

Some potential reasons for disparities in infant mortality

- **Age.** Younger and older mothers have higher preterm birth rates.¹
- **Cigarette smoking.** Smoking is a potential factor for low birth weight and growth retardation. Asian/Pacific Islanders smoke the least and American Indian/Alaska Natives smoke the most.⁴
- **Alcohol consumption.** Alcohol consumption is a potential factor in poor pregnancy outcomes. Whites and American Indian/Alaska Natives have the highest alcohol consumption and Asian/Pacific Islanders have the lowest.⁴
- **Unintended pregnancy.** Births resulting from unwanted conceptions may suffer from elevated risks of infant mortality and low birth weight. In one study, African-American women indicated 29 percent of their births in the previous five years were unintended as opposed to 9.2 percent of white women.⁴
- **Cultural.** Mexican Americans reported more prenatal stress, less support from the baby's father, and more drug/alcohol use.
- **Obesity.** Asian/Pacific Islanders have the lowest obesity rate and African-Americans have the highest.⁴
- **Unequal Care.** Rates of prenatal care in the first trimester:⁶
 85 percent for whites.
 77 percent for Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders.
 75 percent for Hispanics.
 74 percent for African-Americans.
 69 percent for American Indians/Alaska Natives.
- **Education.** More educated pregnant women have greater rates of prenatal care during the first trimester than less educated pregnant women.⁶

1. March of Dimes 2003 Data Book for Policy Makers, "Maternal, Infant, and Child Health in the United States."
2. "Healthy People 2010: An Overview," www.healthy-people.gov.
3. <http://www.epi.umn.edu/let/nfntmort.html>
4. <http://raceandhealth.hhs.gov/3rdpgblue/infant/red.htm>
5. <http://healthdisparities.nih.gov/whatare.html>
6. "National Healthcare Disparities Report," US Dept Health and Human Services, December 2003, Prepublication Copy.

