

LOW BIRTHWEIGHT BABIES

DEFINITION: Number and percentage of infants born weighing less than 2,500 grams or 5 pounds, 8 ounces.

SIGNIFICANCE

Infants who are born at a low weight face a higher risk for a variety of negative outcomes both immediately after birth and throughout their lives. Low birthweight babies face a higher risk of infant death compared to heavier babies. Very low birthweight babies (those born weighing less than 1,500 grams or 3 pounds, 4 ounces) have a 25% chance of dying within the first year of life. Moderately low-birthweight babies (between 1,500 and 2,499 grams) have a 2% chance of dying in the first year of life—much less than that of very low birthweight babies, but about four times the risk faced by babies born weighing more than 2,499 grams.¹

Low birthweight babies are more likely to experience health problems as newborns, ranging from respiratory distress to vision loss.² School-age children who were born at a low birthweight are more likely to be placed in special education classes and to repeat a grade than their peers.³

The most common cause of low birthweight is preterm birth. Cigarette smoking is also one of the most important and well-established risk factors for low birthweight. Even after controlling for other factors, babies whose mothers smoked during pregnancy are twice as likely to be born at low birthweight.⁴

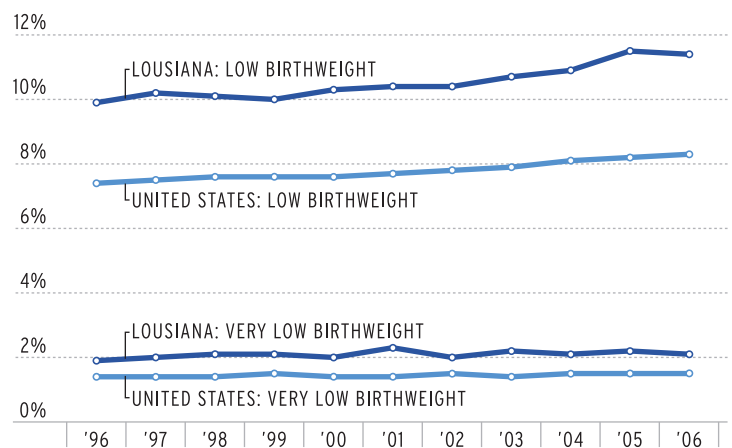
The percentage of low birthweight babies in Louisiana rose between 1990 and 2006, from 9.2% to 11.4% of all births. During the same time period, the national low birthweight rate rose from 7.0% to 8.3%. In 2006, Louisiana had the nation's second-highest rate of low birthweight babies in the country.⁵

RACIAL DISPARITIES

In Louisiana and the nation, infants born to black women are almost twice as likely as infants born to white women to be born at a low weight. The disparity is even more extreme for very low birthweight babies — 3.5% of all Louisiana babies born to black women were born at very low weights, which is 2.7 times as large as the rate for babies born to white women (1.3%).

Racial disparities cannot be explained away by differences in multiple births or economic factors

PERCENTAGE OF BIRTHS AT VERY LOW AND LOW BIRTHWEIGHT TO WOMEN IN LOUISIANA 1996-2006



alone.⁶ American Indian women experience high rates of poverty similar to African Americans, but relatively low rates of low birthweight babies. Additionally, for almost every ethnicity and race, women who are immigrants have better birth outcomes than U.S.-born women.⁷

RATE CALCULATION

$100 * (\text{number of infants born weighing less than 2,500 grams} \div \text{total number of live births})$

$100 * (\text{number of black infants born weighing less than 2,500 grams} \div \text{total number of live births to black women})$

$100 * (\text{number of white infants born weighing less than 2,500 grams} \div \text{total number of live births to white women})$

CHART DATA SOURCE

The Annie E. Casey Foundation, "Low-birthweight babies (Percent) 1996-2006" and "Very Low-birthweight babies (Percent) 1996-2006," KIDS COUNT Online Data Center, retrieved from <http://datacenter.kidscount.org> on 8/1/2009.

DATA SOURCE

Live births 2004-2006: Louisiana State Center for Health Statistics

DATA NOTE

Three years of data were aggregated, then averaged.

¹ Child Trends, "Low and Very Low Birthweight Infants," Child Trends Data Bank, retrieved from <http://www.childtrendsdatabank.org> on 6/30/2009.

² March of Dimes, "Quick Reference Fact Sheets: Low Birthweight," March of Dimes, retrieved from www.marchofdimes.com/professionals/ on 6/30/2009.

³ Child Trends, "Low and Very Low Birthweight Infants," Child Trends Data Bank, retrieved from <http://www.childtrendsdatabank.org> on 6/30/2009.

⁴ Rima Shore, "KIDS COUNT Indicator Brief: Preventing Low Birthweight," The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2009, retrieved from <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/databook> on 8/1/2009.

⁵ The Annie E. Casey Foundation, "Low-birthweight babies (Percent) 1996-2006" and "Very Low-birthweight babies (Percent) 1996-2006," KIDS COUNT Online Data Center, retrieved from <http://datacenter.kidscount.org> on 8/1/2009.

⁶ Rima Shore, "KIDS COUNT Indicator Brief: Preventing Low Birthweight," The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2009, retrieved from <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/databook> on 8/1/2009.

⁷ *ibid.*

LOW BIRTHWEIGHT BABIES (NUMBER AND PERCENT OF BIRTHS)

2004-06 AVERAGE

	TOTAL		BLACK		WHITE		RACIAL DISPARITY RATIO
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
LOUISIANA	7,093	11.3	3,935	15.8	3,012	8.3	1.9
Acadia	112	12.0	43	19.5	69	9.7	2.0
Allen	39	11.2	13	18.3	24	9.1	2.0
Ascension	140	9.0	53	13.7	86	7.5	1.8
Assumption	36	13.0	20	16.4	15	10.0	1.6
Avoyelles	74	12.1	38	16.7	35	9.3	1.8
Beauregard	38	8.0	12	22.0	25	6.1	3.6
Bienville	23	12.0	14	15.1	9	9.3	1.6
Bossier	186	11.2	76	17.8	106	8.9	2.0
Caddo	530	14.3	381	18.0	144	9.4	1.9
Calcasieu	299	10.9	129	15.7	167	8.9	1.8
Caldwell	13	9.3	4	LNE	9	7.8	n.a.
Cameron	6	7.8	<2	LNE	6	LNE	n.a.
Catahoula	19	14.0	8	18.5	11	11.9	1.6
Claiborne	20	11.2	13	12.5	7	9.6	1.3
Concordia	34	15.1	22	19.4	12	10.9	1.8
De Soto	53	13.9	31	17.5	22	10.8	1.6
East Baton Rouge	711	12.1	513	15.5	182	7.7	2.0
East Carroll	21	15.6	19	17.7	2	LNE	n.a.
East Feliciana	31	11.6	19	15.6	12	8.1	1.9
Evangeline	68	12.6	31	17.1	36	10.2	1.7
Franklin	42	14.1	23	17.3	19	11.7	1.5
Grant	25	9.9	4	LNE	21	9.8	n.a.
Iberia	119	10.4	73	14.9	44	7.0	2.1
Iberville	50	10.9	31	11.7	19	10.0	1.2
Jackson	20	10.0	9	13.8	11	8.4	1.6
Jefferson	568	9.9	278	13.8	252	7.7	1.8
Jefferson Davis	43	9.3	13	14.8	29	8.0	1.9
Lafayette	294	9.8	144	14.2	143	7.5	1.9
Lafourche	115	9.6	39	16.3	74	8.1	2.0
La Salle	15	8.6	6	LNE	9	6.1	n.a.
Lincoln	57	10.1	38	14.6	18	6.2	2.4
Livingston	142	8.3	13	15.2	128	7.9	1.9
Madison	24	15.7	19	17.8	4	LNE	n.a.
Morehouse	53	13.1	35	15.4	19	10.3	1.5
Natchitoches	73	12.5	50	16.1	23	8.6	1.9
Orleans	630	13.5	541	15.6	78	7.5	2.1
Ouachita	313	13.5	197	18.4	114	9.3	2.0
Plaquemines	29	8.5	11	13.8	17	7.1	1.9
Pointe Coupee	35	11.6	25	16.8	11	6.8	2.5
Rapides	205	10.6	114	15.0	88	7.7	1.9
Red River	22	15.1	17	21.6	5	LNE	n.a.
Richland	37	12.1	23	16.4	13	8.2	2.0
Sabine	38	11.6	13	16.0	22	10.0	1.6
St. Bernard	64	11.7	13	15.2	49	11.1	n.a.
St. Charles	64	9.2	31	12.9	31	7.1	1.8
St. Helena	17	16.3	13	18.6	5	LNE	n.a.
St. James	33	10.6	24	12.9	9	7.2	1.8
St. John the Baptist	81	11.2	58	14.2	21	7.0	2.0
St. Landry	177	12.7	113	16.1	64	9.2	1.8
St. Martin	81	10.8	43	13.9	36	8.4	1.7
St. Mary	92	11.9	48	15.9	41	9.3	1.7
St. Tammany	241	8.3	54	13.6	183	7.5	1.8
Tangipahoa	204	11.8	125	17.5	78	7.8	2.2
Tensas	11	14.5	8	14.6	3	LNE	n.a.
Terrebonne	194	11.5	68	18.8	115	9.8	1.9
Union	35	10.6	19	16.3	16	7.5	2.2
Vermilion	83	10.3	30	17.5	51	8.3	2.1
Vernon	83	9.0	24	14.7	53	7.4	2.0
Washington	71	11.3	32	13.7	39	9.8	1.4
Webster	68	13.3	33	17.8	35	10.7	1.7
West Baton Rouge	43	12.9	23	17.2	20	10.2	1.7
West Carroll	18	12.4	6	LNE	11	9.8	n.a.
West Feliciana	8	7.3	5	LNE	3	LNE	n.a.
Winn	22	11.0	11	15.7	11	8.5	1.8

*The racial disparity ratio was calculated by dividing the black rate by the white rate. The resulting number shows, for example, that statewide, the percentage of low birthweight black babies was 1.9 times that of white babies. A ratio of one would mean that there was no difference between the black and white rates. Larger numbers reflect a greater racial disparity.

n.a. Racial disparity ratios were not calculated for any parish in which there were fewer than 20 low birthweight babies of either race in the 2004-2006 reporting period.

LNE [low number of events] is used because the rate or percent may be unreliable.