

LOW BIRTHWEIGHT INFANTS

Each year more than thirty-one hundred Oklahoma babies (3,141 annual average) are born *too small* (weighing less than 5 pounds).

A large proportion of these low-weight infants (2,610 annual average) are born *very tiny* (weighing less than 3 pounds, 5 ounces).

During this past year the proportion of Oklahoma babies born too small slowly continued to worsen (increasing from 6.7% to 6.8%), with comparable rates also worsening in slightly under half (36 of 77) of Oklahoma's counties.

A higher proportion of Oklahoma babies (6.8%) are born too small today as compared to the population born in the mid-1980s (6.5%), with such rates also worsening in the majority (43 of 77) of Oklahoma's counties during the same period.

The highest low birthweight rate (10.2%) is found in Choctaw County; the lowest (2.4%) is in Major County.

The low birthweight rate for Black infants (12.2%) nearly doubles the rate for White infants (6.2%).

While early prenatal care is known to improve these rates, only about half (54.8%) of Oklahoma's babies were born to mothers who received the recommended level of prenatal care.

Oklahoma's rate of low birthweight babies relative to other states slipped in ranking from 20th to 23rd during the most recent year (1994) measured.

Talking Points:

Babies born *too small* frequently die or have serious health or developmental problems such as blindness, deafness, chronic respiratory problems, mental retardation, mental illness and cerebral palsy.

Twenty percent of *very tiny* (less than 3 pounds, 5 ounces) babies experience cerebral palsy or other forms of brain injury.

Fifty percent of *very tiny* (less than 3 pounds, 5 ounces) babies later enroll in special education.

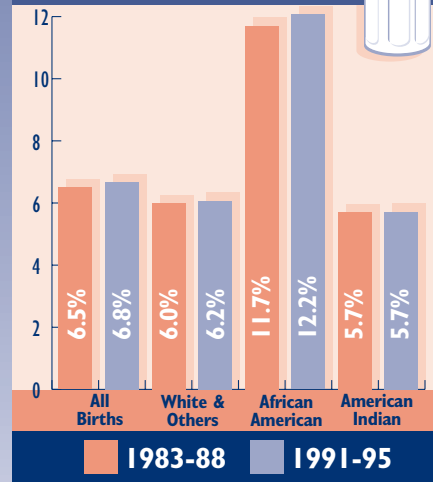
One in four of Oklahoma's low birthweight infants who live will experience serious health and developmental problems. Low birthweight doubles the chance a child will later be diagnosed as having dyslexia, hyperactivity or another disability.

Infants' risk of low birthweight, prematurity, miscarriage, stillbirth and infant death increases if their mothers are poor, are adolescents, smoke during pregnancy or fail to receive adequate prenatal care.

Low birthweight and infant mortality are related. The National Public Health Service estimates that almost 60 percent of the infant deaths each year result directly from low birthweight. In Oklahoma seven out of 10 infants who die in the first month of life are low-weight babies.

Babies Weighing Under 5 1/2 Pounds

Average Annual Percent of All Babies • By Race
Oklahoma • 1983-87 & 1991-95



COUNTIES WITH THE TEN HIGHEST PERCENTAGES OF LOW BIRTHWEIGHT BABIES 1991-1995

More than half (3,141 annual average or 51.8%) of the low birthweight babies were born in four counties: Oklahoma, Tulsa, Comanche, Cleveland.

