

## Low Birthweight Infants

Each year nearly thirty-two hundred Oklahoma babies (3,191 annual average) are born too small (weighing less than 5½ pounds).

A disquieting number of these low-weight infants (526 annual average) are born very, very tiny (weighing less than 3 pounds, 5 ounces).

During this past year the proportion of Oklahoma babies born too small slowly and steadily continued to worsen (increasing from 6.8% to 6.9% of all births), with comparable rates also worsening during the year in most (46 of 77) of Oklahoma's counties.

This trend has continued for years. A higher proportion of Oklahoma babies (6.9% of all births) are born too small today as compared to the population born in the mid-1980s (6.5% of all births), with such rates also worsening in the majority (46 of 77) of Oklahoma's counties during the same period.

The rates of low birthweight births in the majority of Oklahoma counties (41 of 77) were worse than the average county rate (6.5% of all county births). The highest and worst low birthweight rate (9.5% of all county births) continues to be found in Choctaw County; the lowest and best (3.1% of all county births) is in Harper County during this most recent period.

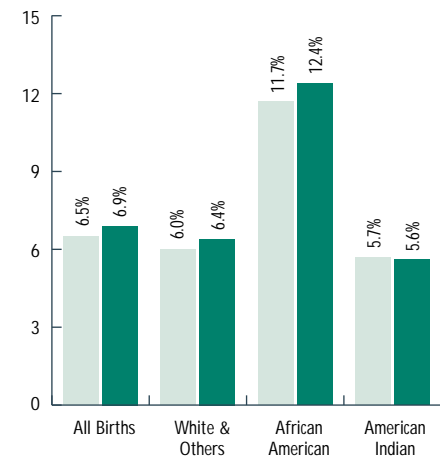
The low birthweight rate for Black infants (12.4% of all Black births) nearly doubles the rate for White infants (6.4% of all White births). The best low birthweight rate and trend is recorded for American Indian infants (5.6% of all American Indian births).

While early prenatal care is known to improve these rates, less than two-thirds (62.0%) of Oklahoma's babies were born to mothers who received the recommended level of prenatal care.

Ranking in the top half of all the states, Oklahoma's rate of low birthweight infants is good relative to other parts of the country. Oklahoma's national rank improved from 23rd to 21st during the most recent year (1995) measured.

## Impact on Oklahoma

- ▶ *Low birthweight kills Oklahoma babies.* 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.
- ▶ *Low birthweight hurts Oklahoma babies and limits their futures.* Of those who live, one in four will experience serious health and developmental problems — dyslexia, hyperactivity, blindness, deafness, chronic respiratory problems, mental retardation, mental illness, cerebral palsy, or others.



Babies Weighing Under 5½ Pounds  
Average Annual Percent of All Babies, By Race, Oklahoma  
1983-87 & 1992-96

- ▶ *The lower the birthweight, the greater the harm.* 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.
- ▶ *Risk factors.* Infants are at risk of being born too small if their mothers are poor, are adolescents, smoke during pregnancy, drink alcohol or take drugs during pregnancy, or fail to receive adequate prenatal care.

Low Birthweight Infants  
*Five-Year Average Annual Percent of Infants Born Weighing Less Than 5½ Pounds; Oklahoma: 1992-1996, State Rate: 6.9%, Average of County Rates: 6.5%*

*Forty-three percent (1,371 per year) of the infants weighing less than 5½ pounds at birth were born to mothers who live in one of the state's two large metropolitan counties (Oklahoma or Tulsa County) which together account for just under forty percent (39.8%) of Oklahoma's births.*

