



Infant Mortality Brief

The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members.

- Mahatma Gandhi

Infant Mortality means the death of an infant before his or her first birthday. Infant mortality rate (IMR) is presented as the number of infant deaths per 1,000 live births.

Infant Mortality is one of the most sensitive indicators often used to measure the health and well-being of a population. Factors such as maternal health, poverty, environment, and barriers to care have a bigger impact on infants than on any other population. The first year of an infant's life is the most vulnerable.

Significant difference in the infant mortality rate by race and ethnicity are apparent; the mortality rate for African American infants more than doubles that of Caucasian infants.

According to the United Health Foundation, Oklahoma ranks 43rd in the nation with an infant mortality rate of 7.4.

Leading causes of infant mortality

- Congenital Malformations (birth defects)
- Short gestation and disorders related to low birth weight
- Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)

National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS)– Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)



Fast Facts about Infant Mortality

PREMATURITY

Premature birth (also known as preterm) occurs before 37 weeks of pregnancy. Prematurity is one of the top three leading causes of infant mortality.

- Babies born early fail to benefit from valuable time to grow and develop. They may have more health problems compared to babies born at full term.
- Premature birth is one of the greatest contributors to infant death. Each year in the United States, about 1 in 10 babies is born prematurely.¹
- Quality prenatal care is a strong predictor of healthy birth outcomes. Mothers who received late or no prenatal care during pregnancy were more likely to give birth to babies with health problems that included low birth weight and even death.²

SAFE SLEEP and SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome)

- Sudden unexpected infant death (SUID) is a term used to describe the sudden and unexpected death of a baby less than 1 year old in which the cause was not obvious before investigation. These deaths often happen during sleep or in the baby's sleep area.³
- A SIDS death is only declared after all other causes and risk factors have been eliminated through a death scene investigation, complete autopsy and review of the infant medical history. In a large number of cases, the cause of death is often ruled as unknown.³
- Between 2013 and 2017, 385 cases of infant death were reviewed by Fetal & Infant Mortality Review (FIMR) at the Oklahoma City-County Health Department. Of those 385 cases, 106 (28%) were sleep-related.

SMOKING

- Mothers who smoke are more likely to deliver their babies early, more likely to have low-birth weight babies and face an increased risk of pregnancy complications.⁴
- Babies whose mothers smoke while pregnant and babies who are exposed to secondhand smoke after birth are more likely to die from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).⁴

POVERTY

- 15.8% of Oklahoma households live in income poverty.⁵
- Poverty rates are higher among children than among adults and seniors. More than 1 in 5 Oklahoma children live in a household with income below the poverty line, compared to about 1 in 10 seniors living in poverty.⁵

FATHERHOOD

- Infants with absent fathers were more likely to be born with lower birth weights, to be preterm and to be small for gestational age.⁶
- Regardless of race or ethnicity, the neonatal death rate of father-absent infants was nearly four times that of their counterparts with involved fathers.⁶
- The risk of poor birth outcomes was highest for infants born to African American women whose babies' fathers were absent during their pregnancies. Even after adjusting for socioeconomic differences, these babies were seven (7) times more likely to die in infancy than babies born to Hispanic and Caucasian women in the same situation.

¹ March of Dimes (2014). Our Campaign to End Premature Birth. St. Louis: Dr. Jennifer House, President. Retrieved from marchofdimes.org.

² Child Trends (2015). Late or No Prenatal Care. Retrieved from <https://www.childtrends.org/indicators/late-or-no-prenatal-care>

³ Center for Disease Control (2018). *Sudden unexpected infant death and sudden infant death syndrome*. Retrieved from <http://cdc.gov/sids/data.htm>.

⁴ Center for Disease Control (2018). *Tobacco Use and Pregnancy*. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/MaternalInfantHealth/TobaccoUsePregnancy/index.htm>

⁵ Oklahoma Policy Institute (2017). *Poverty Profile*. Retrieved from <https://okpolicy.org/2017-oklahoma-poverty-profile/>

⁶ University of South Florida (2016). Father's Involvement Tied to Infant Mortality Rate. Retrieved from <http://news.usf.edu/article/templates/?a=2436>