

VERY LOW BIRTH WEIGHT

According to preliminary data, 1.5 percent of infants were born very low birth weight (less than 1,500 grams, or 3 pounds 4 ounces) in 2009. The proportion of very low birth weight infants has slowly climbed from just over 1 percent in 1980.

Infants born at such low weight are more than 100 times more likely to die in the first year of life than are infants of normal birth weight (above 5 pounds 8 ounces).¹ Very low birth weight infants who survive are at a significantly increased risk of severe health and developmental problems, including physical and sensory difficulties, developmental delays, and cognitive impairment, which may require increased levels of medical, educational, and parental care.²

Infants born to non-Hispanic Black women are over two times more likely than infants born to mothers of other racial/ethnic groups to be very low birth weight. Among infants born to non-Hispanic Black women, 3.1 percent were very low birth weight in 2009, compared to 1.2 percent of infants born to non-Hispanic White and Hispanic women, 1.3 percent born to American Indian/Alaska Native women, and 1.1 percent born to Asian/Pacific Islander women. This difference is a major contributor to the disparity in infant mortality rates between non-Hispanic Black infants and infants of other racial/ethnic groups.³ Although, overall, the rate of very low birth weight was not statistically different from

2008, rates for non-Hispanic White and non-Hispanic Black newborns were down 2-3 percent from 2006.⁴

In 2008 (the latest year for which data are available), the rate of very low birth weight was highest among babies born to mothers aged 45-54 years (3.6 percent). Mothers under 15 years of age also had high rates of very low birth weight (3.0 percent.) The rate was lowest among mothers aged 25-29 years (1.3 percent; data not shown).

1 Matthews TJ, MacDorman MF. *Infant mortality statistics from the 2006 period linked birth/infant death data set. National vital statistics reports; vol 58 no 17.* Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2010.

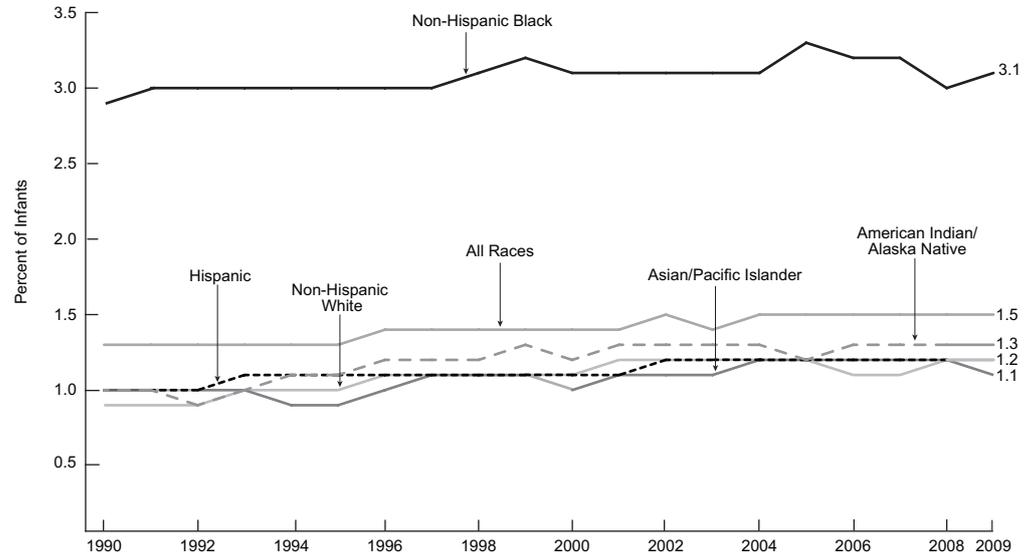
2 Eichenwald EC, Stark AR. *Management and outcomes of very low birth weight.* N Engl J Med 2008;358:1700-1711.

3 Wise PH. *The anatomy of a disparity in infant mortality.* Annu Rev Public Health. 2003;24:341-62.

4 Hamilton BE, Martin JA, Ventura SJ. *Births: Preliminary data for 2009. National vital statistics reports web release; vol 59 no 3.* Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2010.

Very Low Birth Weight Among Infants, by Maternal Race/Ethnicity, 1990–2009*

Source (II.1): Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System



*Data for 2009 are preliminary. **Separate estimates for Asians and Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders were not available.