

PRETERM BIRTH

Babies born preterm, before 37 completed weeks of gestation, are at increased risk of immediate life-threatening health problems, as well as long-term complications and developmental delays. Among preterm infants, complications that can occur during the newborn period include respiratory distress, jaundice, anemia, and infection, while long-term complications can include learning and behavioral problems, cerebral palsy, lung problems, and vision and hearing loss. As a result of these risks, preterm birth is a leading cause of infant death and childhood disability. Although the risk of complications is greatest among those babies who are born the earliest, even those babies born “late preterm” (34 to 36 weeks’ gestation) are more likely than

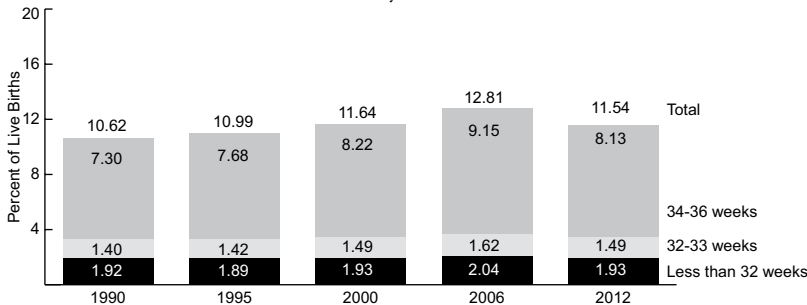
full-term babies to experience morbidity and mortality.¹

According to preliminary data for 2012, 11.54 percent of infants were born preterm. Overall, 8.13 percent of babies were born at 34 to 36 weeks’ gestation, 1.49 percent were born at 32–33 weeks’ gestation, and 1.93 percent were “very preterm” (less than 32 weeks’ gestation). Between 1990 and 2006, the preterm birth rate increased more than 20 percent from 10.62 to 12.80 percent, but has declined by nearly 10 percent since 2006. Recent declines are greatest among the largest category of late preterm infants born at 34 to 36 weeks’ gestation, which may be linked to practice-based efforts to reduce “elective” deliveries prior to 39 weeks that are not medically necessary.²

The preterm birth rate varies by race and ethnicity. In 2012, according to preliminary data, 16.53 percent of babies born to non-Hispanic Black women were born preterm, compared to 10.29 percent of babies born to non-Hispanic White women, and 10.15 percent of babies born to Asian/Pacific Islander women. Among babies born to Hispanic women, 11.58 percent were born preterm, while the same was true for 13.25 percent of babies born to American Indian/Alaska Native women. The causes of preterm birth are not well understood, but are linked to infection and vascular disease, as well as medical conditions, such as diabetes and hypertension, which may necessitate labor induction or cesarean delivery.³

Preterm Birth, by Completed Weeks of Gestation, 1990–2012*

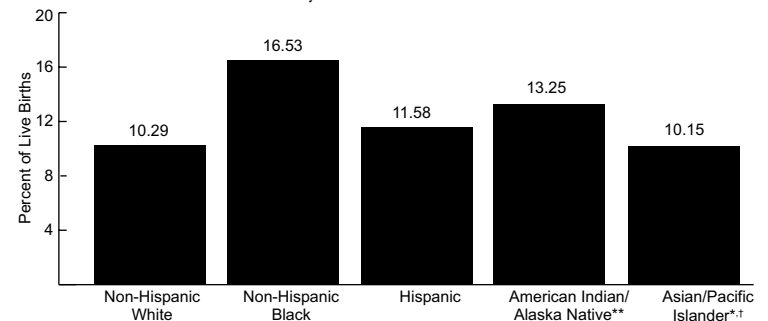
Source (I.1, I.2): Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System



*Data for 2012 are preliminary.

Preterm Birth, by Maternal Race/Ethnicity, 2012*

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



*Data are preliminary. **Includes Hispanics. †Separate data for Asians and Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders not available.