Infant Mortality in California

**What It Is**

Kidsdata.org provides the following measures of infant mortality at the county level:

- Overall infant mortality rate, over three-year periods
- Infant mortality rate by leading causes of death, over three-year periods
- Infant mortality rate by race/ethnicity, over five-year periods

Yearly rates and numbers of infant deaths also are available for California and the U.S.

**Why This Topic Is Important**

Infant mortality is a key measure of a nation’s health, reflecting socioeconomic conditions, maternal health, public health practices, and access to high-quality medical care, among other factors. Major causes of infant mortality include birth defects, low birthweight and preterm birth, maternal pregnancy complications, and sudden infant death syndrome. Reducing infant mortality requires wide-ranging approaches that improve primary care prior to pregnancy, prenatal and well-baby preventive care, specialty care for infants born preterm and those with health conditions, breastfeeding support, and immunizations, along with empowered communities creating safe, healthy environments for all families.

Although the U.S. infant mortality rate has declined in recent decades, it remains higher than rates in most other developed countries. The mortality rate among black infants is particularly high—more than double the rate for white and Asian groups, both nationally and in California.

**How Children Are Faring**

California’s infant mortality rate declined by 40% between 1994 and 2016, from 7 infant deaths per 1,000 births to 4.2 per 1,000. Infant mortality rates statewide have followed but remained lower than U.S. rates over this period.

At the county level, infant mortality rates vary widely, from 2.6 (San Francisco) to 8.1 (Mendocino) among counties with data in 2014-16. Statewide, in 2014-16 and in previous years, the leading causes of infant death were birth defects and disorders related to low birthweight and preterm birth.

Disparities persist in infant mortality rates by race/ethnicity. Statewide, among groups with data in 2012-16, African American/black and
**Locations** | **Rate per 1,000**
---|---
California | 4.3
Alameda County | 3.7
Contra Costa County | 3.4
Fresno County | 6.6
Kern County | 5.6
Los Angeles County | 4.1
Orange County | 3.1
Riverside County | 4.2
Sacramento County | 5.0
San Bernardino County | 5.9
San Diego County | 3.7
Santa Clara County | 3.2

**Definition:** Number of deaths among children under age 1 per 1,000 live births (e.g., in 2014-2016, the mortality rate among California infants was 4.3 deaths per 1,000 births).

**Data Source:** California Dept. of Public Health, Birth and Death Statistical Master Files; National Center for Health Statistics, Linked Birth / Infant Death Records (Feb. 2019).

**Infant Mortality Rate, by Leading Causes of Death: 2014-2016**

- **Birth Defects**
- **Low Birthweight and Preterm Birth**
- **Maternal Pregnancy Complications**
- **Sudden Infant Death Syndrome**
- **Cord and Placental Complications**

**Definition:** Number of deaths among children under age 1 per 1,000 live births, by five leading causes of infant death in California (e.g., in 2014-2016, the mortality rate due to birth defects among California infants was 0.6 death per 1,000 births).

**Data Source:** California Dept. of Public Health, Birth and Death Statistical Master Files; National Center for Health Statistics, Linked Birth / Infant Death Records (Feb. 2019).

Multiracial infants died at rates of at least 9 per 1,000 births, whereas Asian/Pacific Islander and white infants had mortality rates below 4 per 1,000.

**View references for this text and additional research on this topic:**
https://www.kidsdata.org/topic/54/infant-mortality/summary