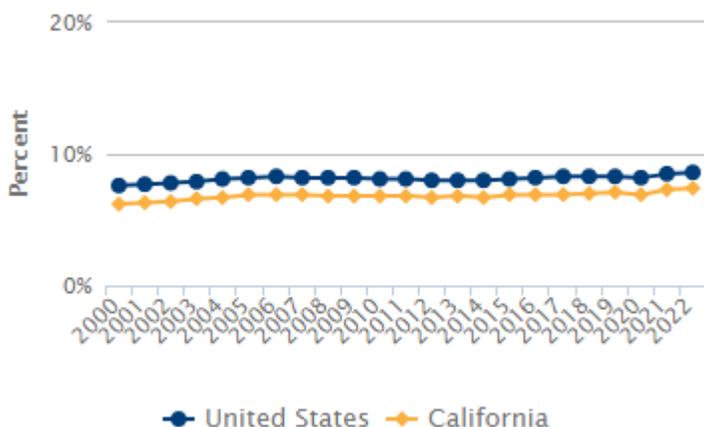


Low Birthweight and Preterm Births in California

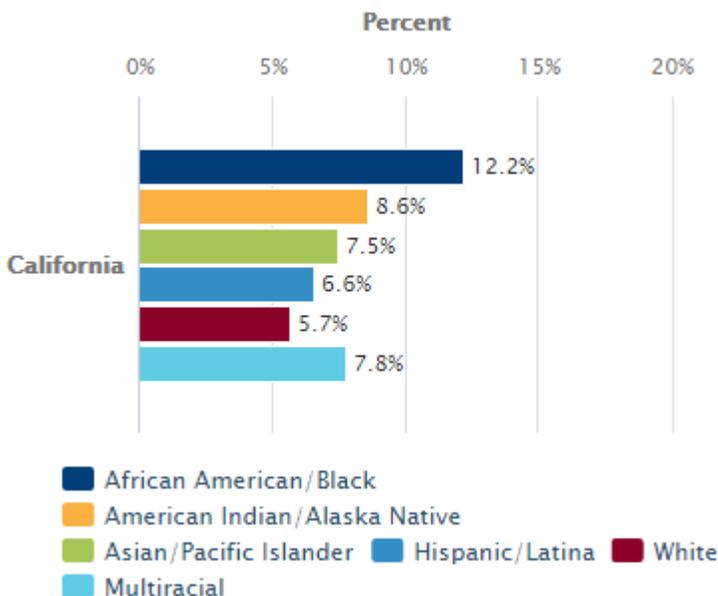
Percentage of Infants Born at Low Birthweight



Definition: Percentage of infants born weighing less than 2,500 grams (approximately 5 lbs, 8 oz). (E.g., in 2022, 7.4% of infants born to California mothers were born at low birthweight.)

Data Source: California Dept. of Public Health, Birth Statistical Master Files (Mar. 2020); CDC WONDER, [Natality Data](#) (Mar. 2024).

Percentage of Infants Born at Low Birthweight, by Mother's Race/Ethnicity: 2017



Definition: Percentage of infants born weighing less than 2,500 grams (approximately 5 lbs, 8 oz), by mother's race/ethnicity (e.g., in 2017, 6.6% of infants born to California Hispanic/Latina mothers were born at low birthweight).

Data Source: California Dept. of Public Health, Birth Statistical Master Files; CDC WONDER, [Natality Data](#) (Mar. 2020).

Percentage of Infants Born at Very Low Birthweight: 2022

What It Is

Kidsdata.org offers the following measures of low birthweight and preterm birth:

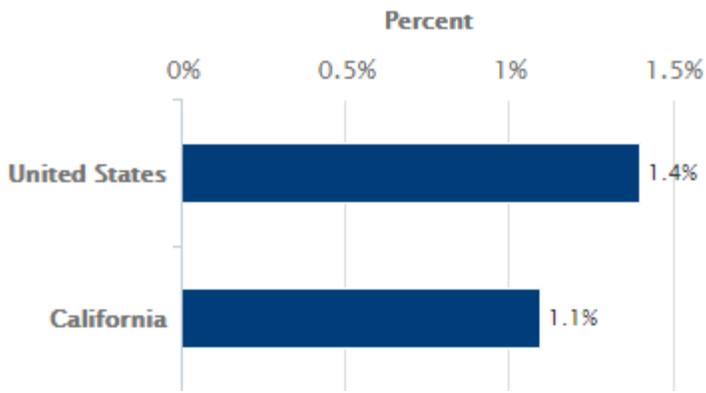
- The number and percentage of infants born at low birthweight (weighing less than 2,500 grams or approximately 5 lbs, 8 oz) overall, by mother's age, and by mother's race/ethnicity
- The number and percentage of infants born at very low birthweight (weighing less than 1,500 grams or approximately 3 lbs, 5 oz)
- The number and percentage of infants born preterm (before 37 weeks of gestation), calculated either by last menstrual period (LMP) or obstetric estimate (OE)

Why This Topic Is Important

Preterm birth and low birthweight are among the leading causes of infant death in the U.S., accounting for billions of dollars spent annually on health care and other services. Babies born prematurely (before 37 completed weeks of gestation) face increased risks of wide-ranging health complications and long-term disabilities, including infections, respiratory problems, and developmental delays. These risks drop significantly as gestational age increases. Health care professionals recommend waiting until 39 to 40 weeks of gestation for delivery, if possible, as critical infant growth and development occur in the final weeks of pregnancy.

While many babies born preterm have low birthweight, this is not always the case. Some infants are born prematurely at normal weight; others are born full-term at low weight. Infants with a low birthweight (less than 5.5 lbs) have increased risks for numerous chronic health and developmental problems. Babies with a very low birthweight (less than 3.3 lbs) face even greater risks of adverse health outcomes.

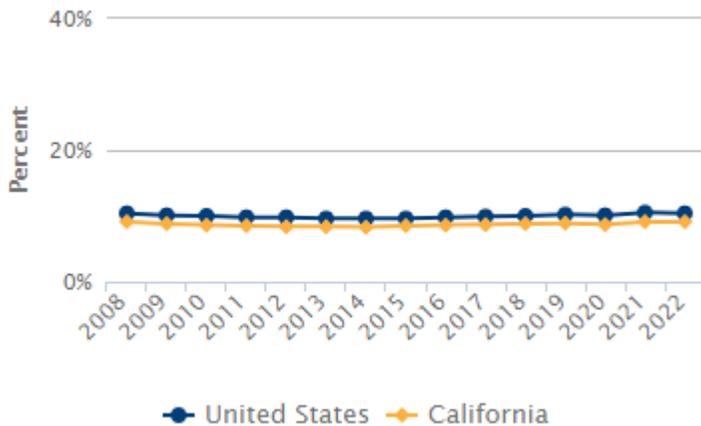
Decades of research have shown large inequities in birth outcomes by race/ethnicity—even after controlling for socioeconomic status—with rates of preterm birth, low birthweight, and infant mortality consistently higher among African American/black populations when compared with other groups. Additional factors linked to preterm birth and low birthweight include smoking or substance use, delayed or inadequate prenatal care, short interpregnancy intervals, and experiences of violence, racism, or stress. Mothers who live in rural areas or



Definition: Percentage of infants born weighing less than 1,500 grams (approximately 3 lbs, 5 oz). (E.g., in 2022, 1.1% of infants born to California mothers were born at very low birthweight.)

Data Source: California Dept. of Public Health, Birth Statistical Master Files (Mar. 2020); CDC WONDER, [Nativity Data](#) (Mar. 2024).

Percentage of Infants Born Preterm



Definition: Percentage of infants born prior to 37 weeks of gestation, based on obstetric estimate of gestational age (e.g., in 2022, 9.1% of infants born to California mothers were born preterm).

Data Source: California Dept. of Public Health, Birth Statistical Master Files (Mar. 2020); CDC WONDER, [Nativity Data](#) (Mar. 2024).

areas with environmental hazards, become pregnant as teenagers or older women, are underweight or overweight during pregnancy, or have existing physical or mental health problems also are at increased risk.

How Children Are Faring

The share of infants born at low birthweight in 2022 was the highest on record since 1995 (the first year for which data are available), statewide and nationally. In California, the more than 31,000 infants born weighing less than 2,500 grams (around 5.5 pounds) accounted for 7.3% of all births that year, up from 6.1% in 1995. More than 4,500 of these babies were born at very low birthweight (or 1,500 grams, approximately 3.3lbs)—1.1% of all births, similar to percentages going back to 1995.

Low birthweight is not experienced evenly across local areas and demographic groups. In 2022, the share of infants born at very low birthweight to Butte County mothers (0.6%) was more than twice the rate for mothers in Sonoma County (1.4%). Statewide and nationally, mothers ages 45 and older consistently deliver a higher percentage of low birthweight babies when compared with younger mothers.

Rates of low birthweight are disproportionately high among African American/black populations. In California and the U.S., across years with data, the share of infants born at low birthweight to African American/black mothers is typically around double that for babies born to white mothers—e.g., 12.2% vs. 5.7% for California in 2017.

The percentage of infants born preterm—prior to 37 weeks of gestation, based on obstetric estimates—to California mothers in 2022 was 9.1%, lower than both the national average of 10.4% and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' *Healthy People 2030* target of 9.4%. California has met this target since 2008 (the first year for which data are available), while the U.S. rate has remained higher than 9.5% over this period.

View references for this text and additional research on this topic:

<https://www.kidsdata.org/topic/56/low-birthweight-and-preterm-births/summary>



More Data: www.kidsdata.org

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