Prenatal Care in California

Definition: Percentage of infants whose mothers received prenatal care during the first trimester of pregnancy (e.g., among California infants born in 2016, 83.6% had mothers who received prenatal care in the first trimester).

Data Source: California Dept. of Public Health, Birth Statistical Master Files (Feb. 2019).

What It Is
Prenatal care is health care received during pregnancy. On kidsdata.org, timely prenatal care is measured by the number or percentage of infants born to mothers who received prenatal care during the first trimester (three months) of pregnancy. These data also are available by race/ethnicity of the infant’s mother.

Why This Topic Is Important
Women need high quality health care before, during, and after pregnancy—this promotes the long-term health of both mothers and children and reduces serious health risks including infant death. Since nearly half of all pregnancies are unintended, and many women may not realize they are pregnant during the critical first weeks of their baby’s development, experts are increasingly focused on promoting the health of reproductive-age women before conception. High quality preconception care should be part of routine health care and should include reproductive planning, address medical conditions and pregnancy risk factors such as weight or heart problems, link women to services for non-medical issues like substance abuse or mental health problems, and educate women about important habits in case of pregnancy.

Once women become pregnant, prenatal care in the first trimester is critical as it lowers the risk of adverse birth outcomes. Through prenatal care, health professionals can identify and resolve medical problems, refer women to services for non-medical issues, and provide health education in general. Prenatal care also helps to ensure that pregnant women receive needed vaccinations, including Tdap and the flu shot, which can protect the mother and baby from certain infections.

Inequities in access to prenatal care by race/ethnicity and other demographic factors have persisted for decades. Reducing these disparities and improving access to preconception and prenatal care for all women has long been a U.S. public health priority. The federal Healthy People 2020 initiative has set national objectives to improve access to preconception and prenatal care, as well as objectives to increase healthy behaviors before and during pregnancy.

How Children Are Faring
Among California infants born in 2016, 84% had mothers who received prenatal care during the first trimester of pregnancy. This figure has held relatively steady in recent years, although
Infants Whose Mothers Received Prenatal Care in the First Trimester, by Mother’s Race/Ethnicity: 2016

Definition: Percentage of infants whose mothers received prenatal care during the first trimester of pregnancy, by race/ethnicity of mother (e.g., among California infants born to Hispanic/Latina women in 2016, 81.5% had mothers who received prenatal care in the first trimester).

Data Source: California Dept. of Public Health, Birth Statistical Master Files (Feb. 2019).

View references for this text and additional research on this topic: https://www.kidsdata.org/topic/59/prenatal-care/summary

it is down from a high of 87% in 2003. Across counties with data, the percentage of infants born in 2016 whose mothers received timely prenatal care varied widely, from 50% (Modoc) to 91% (San Mateo). In 2016, as in previous years, infants born to white (88%) and Asian/Pacific Islander women (85%) had the highest percentages of timely prenatal care among groups with data; infants born to American Indian/Alaska Native women (70%) had the lowest.

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