

Preterm Birth



Babies born more than three weeks early or before they have reached 37 weeks gestation are considered preterm. Preterm birth before 32 weeks gestation or 7½ months are considered very preterm.

The number and rate of preterm births provides an important measure of our current and future health status and needs.

What does research tell us?

- Preterm birth is one of the leading reasons that babies die or are ill in the first year of life.
- Preterm babies are more likely to suffer life-long complications from developmental, neurological, and learning disabilities, and life-long chronic health problems. Also social and economic disadvantages are associated with these disabilities.¹
- Two to three out of 10 babies born weighing under 1500 grams or 3lbs 4 ozs (most are very preterm) have mild to moderate impairments in vision, hearing, speech, and mental and physical ability. Two out of 10 have severe sensory and neurologic impairments.²

- Children who are born weighing under 1500 grams or 3lbs 4 ozs are more likely to have decreased scores in verbal comprehension and processing, reading, spelling, and math. These children are more likely to repeat one or more grades in school, and are less likely to graduate from high school.^{6,7}
- Adolescents who were born weighing under 1000 gms or 2 lbs 3 ozs (most are under 28 weeks gestation) are more likely to have emotional problems, developmental delay, learning disabilities, and hyperactivity.⁵
- Nearly one-half of babies born weighing under 1000 gms have some impairment in sight, hearing, speech, or development evident by age 18 to 22 months.⁴
- By age 7, one-half of children born weighing under 1000 gms require special education.⁸
- The direct medical costs for caring for a single low birthweight or premature infants are estimated to be \$50,000 in excess of the cost for an infant born on time and at a healthy birthweight.[MOD]

What does this mean for Los Angeles County?

Compared with national averages, LA County has a lower rate of preterm births than the U.S. overall.

Each year in LA County:

- 1 out of every 10 babies born is preterm.
- Approximately 2300 babies are born before 32 weeks gestation (very preterm).
- Among babies born very preterm, nearly 650 are born between 24 and 28 weeks gestation (extremely preterm), and at increased risk for the most serious complications described above.



- Without further improvement in medical care or prevention strategies, it is estimated that annually up to 460 of babies born before 32 weeks gestation will have severe vision, hearing, speech, mental and physical impairments, and another 460 to 690 will have mild to moderate impairments

2002 Data

[Preterm Birth- LA County, California, U.S.](#)

Preterm Birth- LA County

- [by SPA](#)
- [by Race/Ethnicity](#)
- [by SPA and Race/Ethnicity](#)
- [by Maternal Age](#)
- [by Insurance](#)

[Percent of Births by Gestational Age Categories under 37 weeks](#)

[Percent of Births by Gestational Age Categories under 32 weeks by SPA](#)

[Percent of Preterm Birth from 1996-2002 by Race/Ethnicity](#)

Data on preterm birth in LA County, California and the U.S. can be found at the [March of Dimes-Peristats](#) website.

References

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