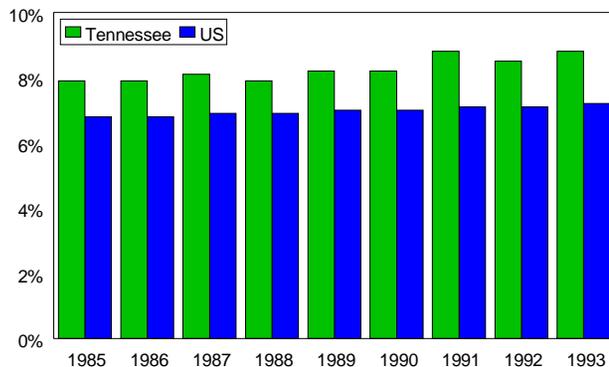


Percent Low-Birth-Weight Babies

Nine-Year Comparison Between Tennessee and US Average



Source: Casey Foundation, (1996). Kids Count Data Book: State Profiles of Child Well-Being

LOW-BIRTH-WEIGHT BABIES

Too many babies are born with low birth weight in Tennessee. The percent of babies born of low-birth weight has increased 6.1% from 1990 to 1995. In 1990, 8.2% of the babies born (6,160 babies) weighed less than 5.5 pounds. The percent of low-weight births increased to 8.7% in 1995 when 6,386 babies were born weighing less than 5.5 pounds.

Nationally, Tennessee ranks 47th worst on this indicator. The national *Kids Count Data Book* compared Tennessee's rates in 1985 and 1993 with the national rates. In 1985, Tennessee's rate was 7.9% compared to the national rate of 6.8%. The state's rate in 1993 was 8.8% compared to the national rate of 7.2%.

Low-birth weight is a major determinant of infant deaths. Research has found this especially true among those groups characterized by socioeconomic disadvantage. Low-birth-weight babies are 40 times more likely to die during the first month of life than normal-

weight infants, according to research findings.

If the infants survive, they are much more likely to suffer from multiple health and developmental problems because of their fragile conditions. Low-birth-weight infants are at risk of developing chronic respiratory problems such as asthma. These babies may experience neurological problems associated with prematurity resulting in seizures, epilepsy, hydrocephalus, cerebral palsy, or mental retardation.

Low-birth-weight babies may also have hearing or vision problems which may be so severe that they could result in blindness or deafness. These infants could be at risk for developing problems such as learning disabilities, hyperactivity, emotional problems, and/or mental illness.

Some factors common to low-weight births are known: inadequate prenatal care; teen pregnancy; poverty; and pregnant women using tobacco, alcohol, and illegal drugs.