

Infant Mortality

Infant mortality in Tennessee is defined as the rate at which babies die before their first birthday. From 1987 to 1997 Tennessee's infant mortality rate decreased by 27 percent, but was still worse than the national average for 1997. In 1997, Tennessee was ranked worse than 40 other states in infant mortality (KIDS COUNT, 2000).

In 1998, there were 370 white babies and 255 African-American babies that died before their first birthday. African-American babies died at a rate (15.1) nearly two and one half times more often than white babies (6.3).

During the past 30 years maternal and infant mortality has declined in the general population; people are living longer due to medical advances that prolong life. However, there remains an unfinished agenda in child survival. Nationally, 12 million children under the age of 5 continue to die each year from preventable causes. Five million die within the first 28 days of life, almost two-thirds of whom die within the first week. When the 4.3 million annual fetal deaths are added, the importance of combating neonatal and perinatal mortality becomes self-evident (Child Health Research Project, 1999).

Several factors are related to infant mortality. Higher educational attainment of mothers is associated with lower levels of infant mortality (Population Reference Bureau). Infant mortality rates tend to be linked with social and economic conditions in a community. The communities with higher rates of poverty, high unemployment, and poor housing tend to have higher infant mortality rates than communities without these problems.

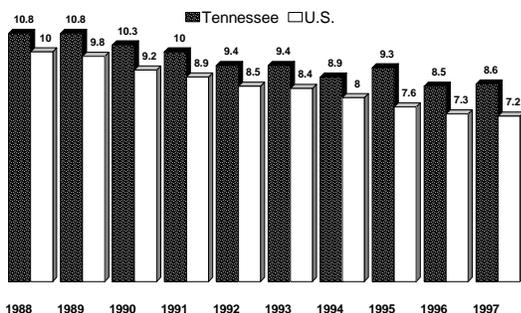
Other maternal behaviors are associated with infant mortality, including mothers who initiate prenatal care beyond the first trimester, smoke, have poor nutritional habits, use drugs or alcohol, and repeat another birth within six months of a previous one.

What Works

Infant mortality rates reflect the effectiveness of social and health care measures in communities. To improve infant mortality also requires improving the social, economic, environmental, and political disparity linked to poor outcomes for children, all children.

Infant Mortality Rate
(Per 1,000 Live Births)

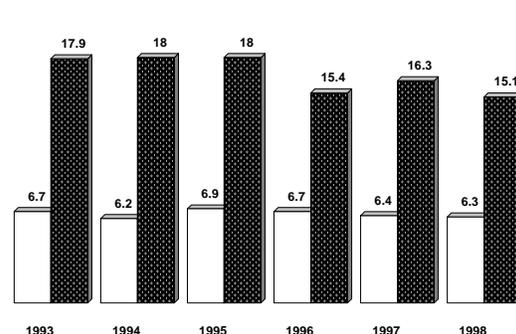
Ten-Year Comparison Between Tennessee and U.S.



Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation (1999) Kids Count Data Book, State Profiles of Child Well-Being. Baltimore: The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Tennessee Infant Mortality Rate By Race
(Per 1,000 Live Births)

White African-American



Source: Tennessee Department of Health 1993, Office of Health Statistics and Information.