Infant Mortality

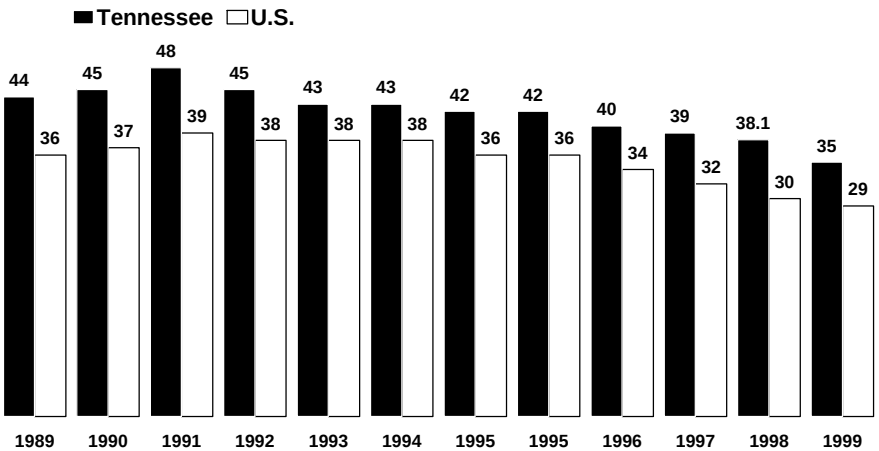
The term infant mortality rate is used to describe children who die prior to reaching their first birthday. "The infant mortality rate in the United States fell to its lowest level ever in 2000 - 6.9 infant deaths per 1,000 live births, down from a rate of 7.1 in 1999" (CDC, 2002).

The Population Reference Bureau writes: "The best news of the 20th century was the steady, long-term decline in the risk of deaths for infants and children. Around the time of World War I, one in 10 babies born in the United States died before age 1. The infant rate for minority infants approached 1 in 5…similar to those found today in some of the poorest countries of the world, such as Sierra Leone and Ethiopia. Today infant and child deaths are much less common. There are seven infant deaths for every 1,000 babies born in the United States" (PRB, 2002).

At the national level significant differences continue in the infant survival rates of White and African-American children. A study by the Centers for Disease Control published in the July 12, 2002, issue of *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* found that "although the overall national infant mortality rate has declined in the past 20 years, African-American infants are now more than twice as likely to die before their first birthdays as white infants." (McKenna, 2002)

Teen Birth Rate, Ages 15-17
Rate Per 1,000 Females

Twelve-Year Comparison Between Tennessee and U.S.



Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation 2002. Kids Count Data Book: State Profiles of Child Well-Being.

The study "found that the national infant mortality rate has declined by nearly 50 percent since 1980, dropping from 12.6 deaths per 1,000 live births to 6.9 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2000" (McKenna, 2002). But while the mortality rate for White infants declined by 48 percent since 1980, it has fallen only 37 percent among African-American infants during the same time period. (McCook, 2002) The result is that the current infant mortality rate among White infants is 5.7 deaths per 1,000 live births, while among African-American infants there are 14 deaths per 1,000 live births. The racial disparity in infant mortality rates is now wider than it was 20 years ago, when African-American infants were twice as likely to die as White infants" (Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 2002).

Similar to the national level, in Tennessee there are disparities in the survival rates between White and African-American infants. In 2002 the state had an overall infant mortality rate of nine per 1,000 live births. During the same time period, the rate of White infant deaths was 6.6 while the rate of African-American infant deaths was 18.1 per 1,000 live births (TDH, 2002).

Infant death rates in Tennessee remained fairly steady from 1996 through 1998 with a decrease in 1999. The rate increased again in 2000 to a rate of 9. While the 2000 White infant death rate was consistent with the White rates for 1996 and 1997, the 2000 African-American rate of 18.1 was the highest for the five-year period" (TDH, 2002).