

BIRTH HIGHLIGHTS

In 2006, the number of resident live births in Nebraska increased for the eleventh time in the last 12 years, reaching its highest level since 1982. A total of 26,723 live births were recorded among Nebraska women in 2006, compared to the 2005 tally of 26,142. The 2006 number also translates into a crude birth rate of 15.1 live births per 1,000 population.

Nebraska's increasing number of live births is largely the result of a surge in the number of live births within the state's Hispanic population. Comparison of 2006's live birth data with 1994 (the year that the current upward trend in live births began) show that live births among Hispanic women rose from 1,378 to 3,999, a 190% increase, while live births among non-Hispanic women rose from 21,753 to 22,724, a 4% increase. This trend is most likely the result of Nebraska's expanding Hispanic population, which has tripled in size since 1990.

Among Nebraska women giving birth to their first child, the average age has risen only slightly during the present decade, from 24.5 years in 2000 to 24.7 years in 2006, after much larger increases were recorded during the 1970s and 1980s. Among Nebraska women giving birth to their second and third children, the trends are much the same: in both instances, the average age rose during the 1970s, 1980s, and into the early 1990s, but has changed little since the mid-1990s. In fact, the average age of Nebraska women giving birth to their second child was 27.5 years in 2006, compared to 27.6 years in 1995 and 2000. For Nebraska women bearing a third child, the average age was 29.3 years in 2006, compared to 29.5 years in 1995 and 29.3 years in 2000.

Although Nebraska women today are having children later than earlier generations, the majority of all births still occur among women in their twenties. In 2006, women 20-29 accounted for 57.6% of all Nebraska live births, compared to 32.4% for women 30-39, 8.0% for teenaged women, and 2.0% for women 40 and older.

Nebraska's 2006 live births included 420 sets of twins, 15 sets of triplets, and 1 set of quadruplets. Nebraska has experienced increasing numbers of multiple births in recent years. By comparison, Nebraska recorded 292 sets of twins and 3 sets of triplets in 1986, just 20 years ago.

Nebraska's 2006 live births also included 1,910 low birth weight babies, i.e., babies that weighed less than 2500 grams (about 5 ½ pounds) at birth. This figure translates into a low birth weight rate of 71.5 per 1,000 live births, which is an increase from the 2005 figure of 69.7. Nebraska's annual low birth weight rate has increased steadily since falling to an all-time low of 52.8 in 1990. Long-term trends show that low weight birth rates declined throughout the 1970s and 1980s in Nebraska, before reversing direction in the 1990s and during the present decade.

Among the low birth weight babies born to Nebraska women in 2006, 333 were of very low weight, i.e., they weighed less than 1500 grams (about 3.3 pounds) at birth. This figure translates into a very low birth weight rate of 12.5 per 1,000 live births, an increase from the 2005 figure of 11.9. For many years, Nebraska's annual very low birth weight rate showed no consistent trend in any direction, but between 1986 and 1996, it rose by about 50%, and has changed little since.

BIRTH HIGHLIGHTS (continued)

The Nebraska birth certificate was substantially revised in 2005, adding data that have never been gathered before and altering the way that some existing data are collected. As a result, some data are not comparable to data collected in years prior to 2005. One such variable affected in this way is the trimester when prenatal care began. These data are now based on the actual calendar date when prenatal care began, which should improve their accuracy, but which has also increased the amount of missing information. In 2006, birth certificate data showed that prenatal care began during the first trimester of pregnancy for 71.5% of all Nebraska live births, a slight improvement from the 2005 figure of 71.3%. The 2006 figure increases to 75.4% when births with missing data are excluded. 2005 also marked the first year that Nebraska used the Kotelchuck Index as an indicator of the adequacy of prenatal care. This statistic combines information from the birth certificate concerning when prenatal care began and the number of prenatal visits from when prenatal care began to delivery. Using this measure, 13.6% of Nebraska's 2006 live births occurred among women who did not receive adequate prenatal care, compared to 14.1% in 2005.

The number of live births that occurred among unmarried Nebraska women increased in 2006, continuing a long-standing trend. A total of 8,617 live births were recorded in Nebraska among unmarried women in 2006, up from the 8,068 recorded in 2005. The 2006 figure represents 32.2% of the state's total number of resident live births, and this proportion is the highest ever recorded in Nebraska history. Thirty years ago, in 1976, teenaged mothers accounted for just over half of all births to unmarried women in Nebraska, but by 2006, this proportion had fallen to only one in five (21.6%).

Tobacco use is a well-known risk factor for a variety of adverse birth outcomes, including low birth weight, prematurity, and infant death. Tobacco use during pregnancy is another variable that was changed as part of the Nebraska birth certificate revisions that took place in 2005. It now includes tobacco use during the three months prior to pregnancy, and separates tobacco use during pregnancy by trimester. These data show that, in 2006, 21.2% of Nebraska women who gave birth to a live-born infant had smoked during the three months before their pregnancy; this figure steadily declined during pregnancy, to 15.3% for women in their first trimester, 12.5% for women in their second trimester, and 11.8% for women in their third trimester.

A total of 1,113 birth defects were diagnosed among 676 children born to Nebraska women in 2006. The latter figure translates into a rate of 25.3 cases per 1,000 resident live births and stillborns. Defects of the circulatory system were the most frequently diagnosed conditions in Nebraska in 2006, accounting for 302 (27.1%) of all defects reported. Musculoskeletal conditions were the second most frequently reported defects among Nebraska children in 2006, with 208 diagnoses, followed by genitourinary system defects, with 152 diagnoses. Nebraska's 2006 data also show that birth defects were reported over three times more often among low birth weight (less than 2500 grams) babies than among babies of normal weight. In addition, birth defects were more likely to be diagnosed among males and children born to women 40 years of age and older.