

3. Low Birth Weight

What It Is

Low birth weight is measured by the number of infants who are born weighing less than 2,500 grams (5.5 pounds), and is expressed as a percentage of total live births per year.

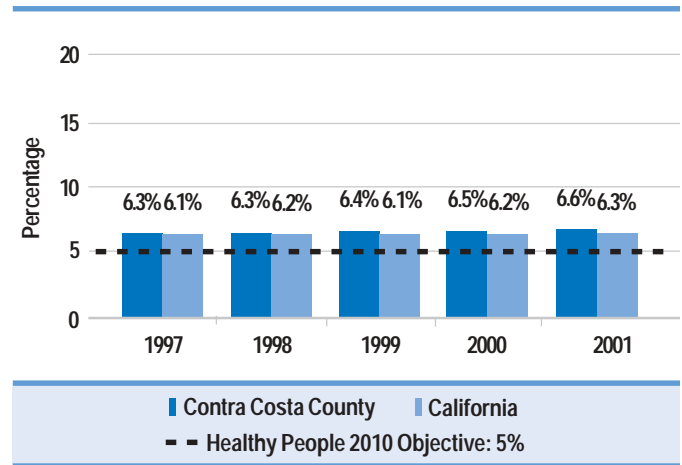
Why It Is Important

Infant birth weight is affected by many factors including the quality and timeliness of prenatal care, and is directly related to infant survival, health and development. Low birth weight is a risk factor for a variety of developmental problems including mental retardation, developmental delays, visual and hearing defects, chronic respiratory problems, autism, and learning difficulties. Infants born at very low weight (less than 1,500 grams or 3.3 pounds) are especially fragile.

How We Are Doing

The percentage of babies born at low weight in Contra Costa County increased from 6.3% in 1997 to 6.6% in 2001, consistently exceeding the statewide rate and remaining above the Healthy People 2010 Objective of 5%. The percentage of low birth weight babies was highest among African Americans, at 13.2%, followed by 8.1% for Asian/Pacific Islanders, 6.1% for Caucasians, and 4.6% for Latinos. According to *Maternal, Child & Adolescent Health in Contra Costa County 1991-1999*, published in January 2003, low birth weights changed for specific racial/ethnic groups; between 1991 and 1999, the rate of low weight births decreased by 15% for African-American women and increased by 11% for Hispanic women. A total of 870 babies were born at low birth weight in 2001, including 122 born at very low weights (less than 1,500 grams or 3.3 pounds).

Figure 3.1 — Percentage of Infants Born at Low Weight



Source: California Department of Health Services, Center for Health Statistics, Birth Records, 2002.

Note: The Healthy People 2010 Objective is 5% of live births.

Table 3.1 — Contra Costa County Percentage of Infants Born at Low Weight by Ethnicity, 2001

Ethnicity	Total Number of Births at Low Weight	Percentage of Births at Low Weight
African American	167	13.2%
Asian / Pacific Islander	144	8.1%
Caucasian / Other / Unknown	382	6.1%
Latino	177	4.6%
Total Births	870	6.6%

Source: California Department of Health Services, Center for Health Statistics, Birth Records, 2002.

Note: Percentage is based on the number of women receiving first trimester prenatal care in each ethnicity divided by the total number of births for each ethnicity.