

Health Brief: Infant Mortality in Tennessee

HEALTH BRIEF

STATE of the **STATE**

INFANT MORTALITY

A baby dies in Tennessee every 15 hours. 

Infant mortality costs Tennessee

\$610 million

annually 

Infant mortality refers to any baby who dies before his or her first birthday.

The infant mortality rate is the number of children out of every 1,000 live births who die before turning one.

Because the survival of babies is indicative of the health of populations as a whole, infant mortality rate is often used as a gauge of the well-being of a society.

How common is infant mortality?

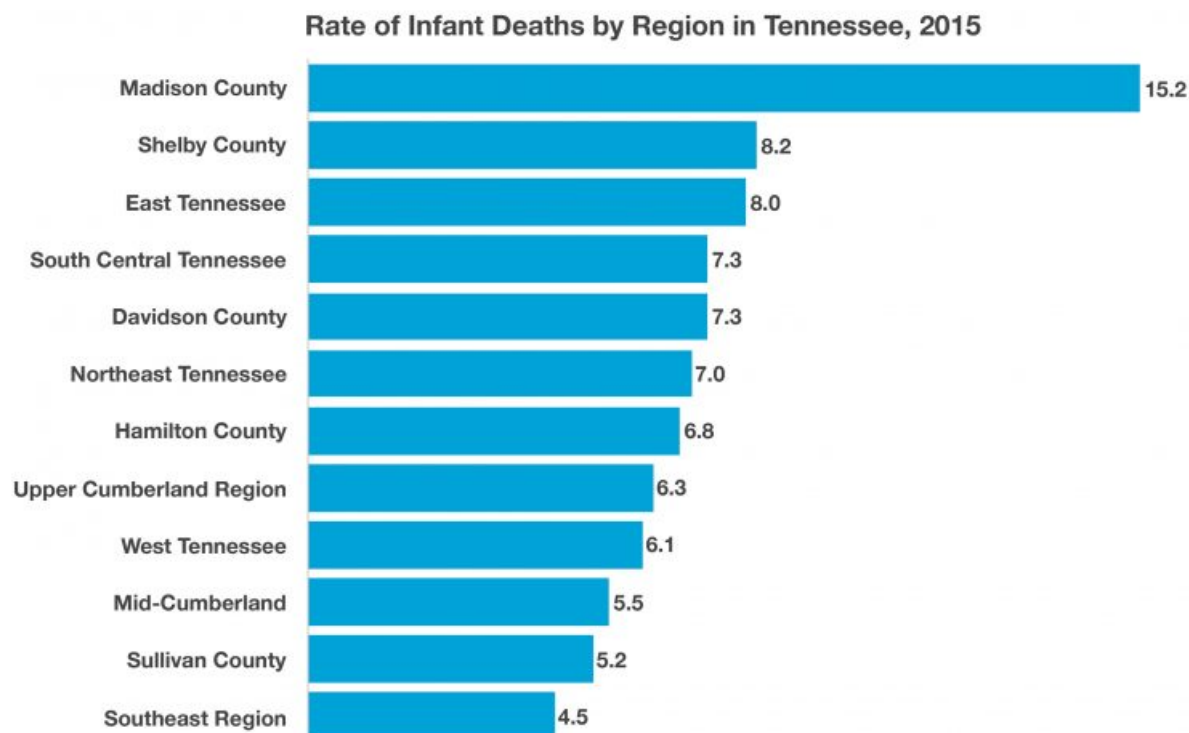
In the U.S.

- The infant mortality rate in the U.S. is 5.8 per 1,000 live births.
- That infant mortality rate in the U.S. is comparable to the rate in developing countries like Bosnia, Chile and Cuba.

In Tennessee

In 2015, 91.7% of infant deaths in Tennessee occurred in the first 6 months of a baby's life.

- The infant mortality rate in Tennessee is 7 per 1,000 live births.
- The highest rate of infant mortality in Tennessee is 15.2 in [Madison](#), just north of Nashville.
- Shelby County has the second highest infant mortality rate in Tennessee at 8.2.

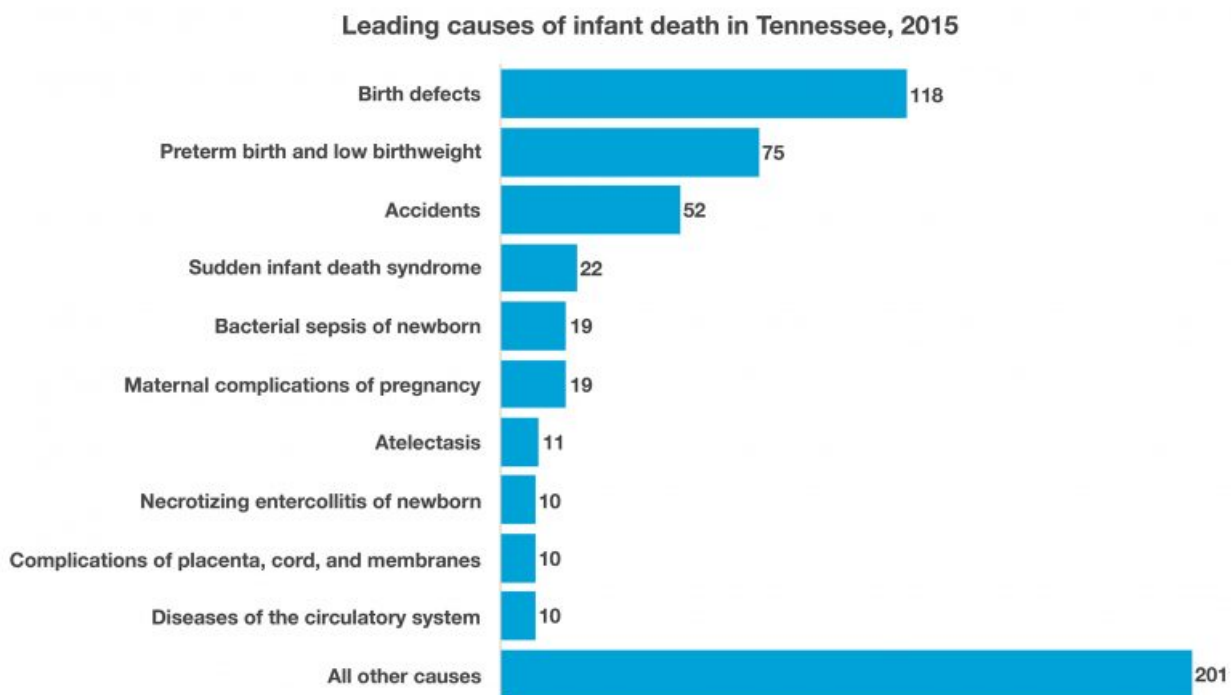


What causes infant mortality?

U.S.

According to the CDC, the most common reasons babies die within the first year of life are:

- Birth defects
- Preterm birth (before 37 weeks)
- Low birth weight (less than 5 lbs., 8 oz.)
- Pregnancy complications
- SUID — Sudden Unexplained Infant Deaths (SUID)
- Injuries (ex. suffocation)



In Tennessee

Birth defects were the leading cause of infant death in Tennessee in 2015.

The majority (90.2%) of accidental infant deaths in Tennessee were caused by suffocation and strangulation, followed distantly by motor vehicle accidents (7.8%). [2015]

Sudden Unexplained Infant Deaths (SUID)

SUID is the death of an infant before age 1 that occurs suddenly and unexpectedly, and whose cause of death is not immediately obvious before investigation.

African-American and Native American infants are at a higher risk.

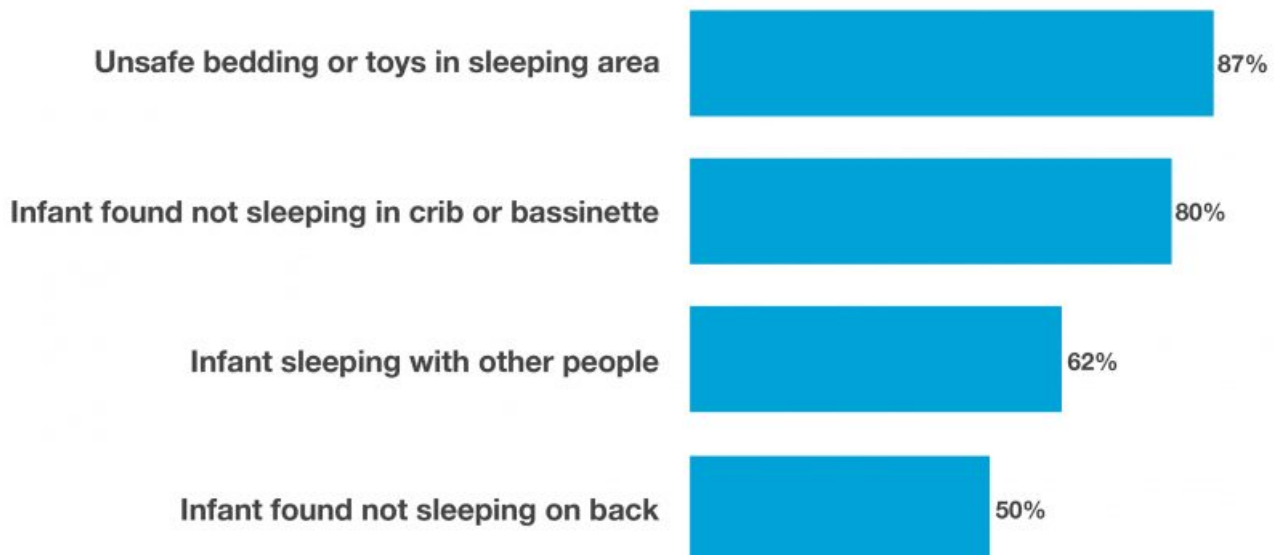
Sleep-related deaths

Many deaths that used to be classified as SUID are now known to be sleep-related.

Although cause of death in many children can't be explained, most occur while the infant is sleeping in an unsafe sleep environment.

In 2015, 87% of sleep-related infant deaths in Tennessee occurred with unsafe bedding in the sleep area including comforters, blankets, pillows, bumper pads or toys.

Contributing Factors to Sleep-related SUID Deaths, Tennessee 2013



* Percentages do not sum to 100% because some infants had multiple factors

Prenatal care

Mothers without prenatal care are **2X** as likely to **lose their babies** in the first year.

Only 71% of women in Tennessee get prenatal care in their first trimester. Of African-American women, only 65% do.

15% of women in Tennessee smoke during pregnancy.

What are the risk factors?

- **Socioeconomic status**
 - **Sleep habits of the baby**
 - **The mother's:**
 - **Age**
 - **Prenatal care**
 - **Smoking**
 - **Health**
 - **Lack of information**
 - **Generational misinformation (ex. grandparents passing down unhealthy habits)**
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What can help prevent infant mortality?

- **Promote safe sleep**
 - **Increase prenatal care**
 - **Stop smoking during pregnancy**
 - **Manage any current health conditions before pregnancy**
 - **Decrease unintended pregnancies**
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How is BlueCross addressing infant mortality?

The BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee Health Foundation has contributed more than \$9.8 million to bring at-risk babies into the world healthy and strong, to reduce pre-term births and to improve the health of children and their mothers.

In Tennessee, BlueCross has:

- **Awarded **IMPACT**** — the “Infant Mortality Public Awareness Campaign for Tennessee” — a two-year grant of \$141,116. IMPACT is a teen-led education program about the infant mortality in Hamilton County.
 - **Given **STORC**** — Solutions to Obstetrics in Rural Counties telemedicine program — a grant of \$600,000 over the next three years.
 - **Supported Chattanooga's **Baby University****, which offers classes and in-home visits on nutrition, language skills and discipline to parents of children up to two years old. BlueCross donated \$75,000.
 - **Donated \$6.2 million to **The Blues Project****, a collaborative effort with researchers at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center to impact the high infant mortality rate in Memphis.
 - **Awarded \$2.5 million to Better Birth Outcomes**, a Vanderbilt University research-based program to improve the gestational age of newborns carried by at-risk women.
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To learn more about infant mortality in Tennessee visit:
bettertennessee.com/tag/infant-mortality