



SOUTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF
PUBLIC HEALTH

Birth Defects in South Carolina



LEGISLATIVE BRIEF

DECEMBER 2025

The South Carolina Birth Defects Program (SCBDP), established by state law in 2004, works to improve outcomes across the state through prevention, research, and referrals. In accordance with South Carolina Statute Section 44-44-90, the Department of Public Health (DPH) is required to report annual data on birth defects, including analyses of incidence, trends, mortality, and outcomes.

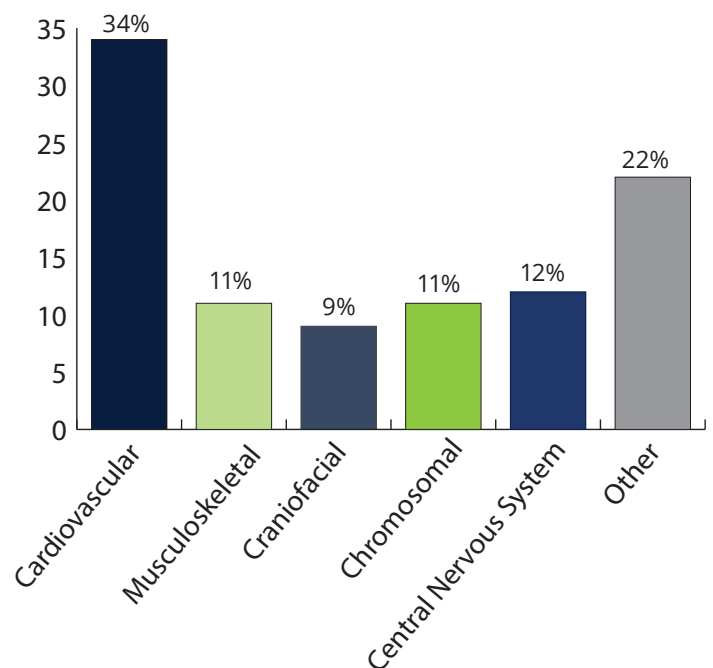
Birth defects are health conditions present at birth that can affect how a baby's body looks, works, or both. Birth defects are a leading cause of infant mortality. The well-being of each child affected with birth defects depends mostly on which organ or body part is involved, how it is affected, early detection, and timely referral to treatment and/or services.



South Carolina Numbers

- **1 in 33** babies is born with a birth defect.
- Birth defects are **the number one cause** of infant death in South Carolina, accounting for **1 in 6** infant deaths.
- **1,700**: approximate number of babies that will be born with a birth defect this year.

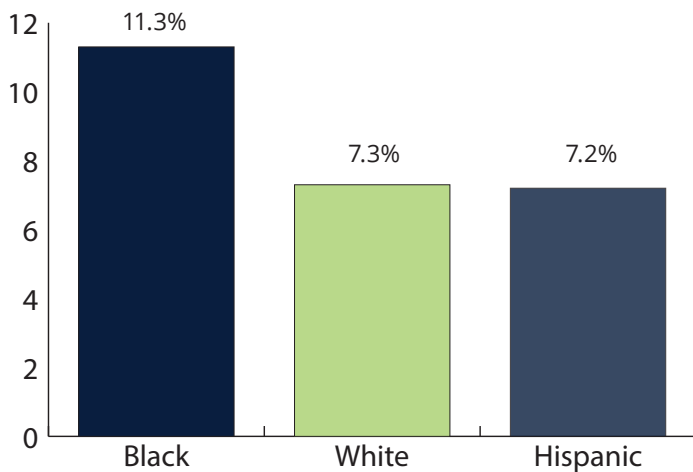
Birth defects identified by SCBDP 2014-2024



Cardiovascular defects are almost three times more common than defects associated with the central nervous system, which is the second most common category of birth defect identified in South Carolina.

Staff are currently partnering with cardiologists from the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) and Prisma Health to research the impact of Critical Congenital Heart Defects across the lifespan.

Deaths among infants with birth defects in SC born 2014 to 2024 by ethnicity



Research

South Carolina is one of 10 states to be awarded the Advancing Population-Based Surveillance of Birth Defects grant funded by the CDC. The state has participated in important research studies through this grant, with results presented at the state and national levels.

In 2025, the Birth Defects Program launched a targeted study on prenatal detection of critical congenital heart defects (CCHDs). These conditions are the most common type of birth defect in South Carolina and can be life-threatening without timely diagnosis. Early identification can significantly improve outcomes, and this research highlights how limited maternity care access and public insurance contribute to delayed detection, guiding future investments to strengthen prenatal diagnostic capacity in underserved communities.

1,477 CCHD cases from 2014-2023 were analyzed

- 702 prenatal and 775 postnatal diagnoses.
- Cases from an area with low access to maternity care had significantly higher odds of a postnatal diagnosis.
- Cases with private insurance had significantly lower odds of a postnatal diagnosis.

Black infants with birth defects are more likely to die than their White or Hispanic counterparts.

SCBDP receives medical records from all South Carolina birthing hospitals and many outpatient facilities and tracks over 85 conditions. Review of birth outcomes informs prevention, research, and systems of care.

Prevention

SCBDP has partnered with Greenwood Genetic Center's Neural Tube Defect Prevention Program since 2018 to connect women at high risk (including but not limited to those who have a history of a prior pregnancy with a neural tube defect) to the program for increased prevention and education through targeted referrals.

In January 2025, the program celebrated Governor Henry McMaster's proclamation of Birth Defects Awareness Month and spread prevention messaging through several media engagements.

Referrals

In 2025, the SCBDP referred 424 children to the state's early intervention system, BabyNet. In November 2024, the program began sending resource packets to parents of children recently diagnosed with a birth defect. Since these mailings began, there has been a significant increase in the number of families who schedule BabyNet intake appointments after referral.

Questions?

Contact scbdp@dph.sc.gov