

[Back](#)

A User's Guide To

The Current Birth Data Bulletin

By State, Region and County

The Current Birth Data Bulletin, by State, Region and County is a monthly publication of the Center for Health Statistics. The primary audience includes Area Managers and Health Unit Administrators and their staff. Using a standardized format, each Bulletin typically has six pages of data - two pages for each county, two pages for the Management Area in which that county resides, and two pages with the State totals. This enables trend comparisons to be made between the county, region, and State.

At this time, the Bulletin focuses exclusively on Maternal and Child Health issues. These particular indicators have been selected because of specific requests for these data and because there is a sufficient number of these events to make publishing the data feasible. All of the data are taken from the Birth Certificate database for 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010.

The tables in the Bulletin include counts (and percents) for:

- Total Births (first table)
- Births to Women Under Age 20 (teen births) (2nd & 3rd tables)
- Births to Unmarried Women (4th & 5th tables)
- Births to Unmarried Women Under Age 20 (6th & 7th tables)
- Births to Women Under Age 18 (young teens) (8th & 9th tables)
- Low Birth Weight (under 2500 grams) Births (10th & 11th tables)
- Births to Women With Less Than 12 Years of Education (12th & 13th tables)
- Births to Women With First Trimester Prenatal Care (14th & 15th tables)
- Births to Smoking Mothers (16th & 17th tables)
- Births by Cesarean Deliveries (18th & 19th tables)
- Preterm Births (Gestational Age Less Than 37 Weeks) (20th & 21st tables)

The first table of data reports the total number of live births to residents of the county (or Area) in question. These are tallied by the month of the birth, with the calendar year total at the right. Reading horizontally, trends over time can be tracked. Comparisons with the same month in the previous year(s) are done by reading vertically.

Subsequent tables are subsets of the first table. Each pair of tables consists of a count of the number of events and the percent of the corresponding total events in the first table. For example, the second table is the "Total Number of Births to Women Under Age 20" by month and year. The third table is entitled "Births to Women Under Age 20 as a Percent of All Live Births." All succeeding tables are in pairs and follow the same format.

At the right side of each table is a notation indicating whether the data are considered "final" or "provisional." The data are "final" when they have been thoroughly cleaned and edited, and reporting is effectively complete. Final data are the basis of the formal, annual reports produced by the Center for Health Statistics. "Provisional" data are still being cleaned and edited.

More importantly, provisional data are often not yet complete. This is particularly a problem for the most recent months. The most current month will have smaller numbers of births than preceding months. As a result of the delays inherent in the system, the number of events for the most recent months will increase as the birth certificates are received and they are entered into the database. Consequently, a report of February data, which is tabulated in March, will show fewer births than February data which is tabulated in April.

Reporting delays will be especially noticeable in border counties near hospitals in neighboring states (e.g., Miller County near Texarkana, Texas and Crittenden County near Memphis, Tennessee). Since the Division of Vital Records is entirely dependent upon those states for the submission of the data, there may be delays of as much as six months, and sudden changes in counts may occur in those counties. In order to ensure that the most complete data are available, older reports should be disposed of as new ones arrive each month.

Comments and suggestions are most welcome and should be directed to:

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[Back](#)