

Infant Mortality

Public Health Brief

Shelby Graves, Health Policy Analyst



Infant Mortality ¹

The health and well being of mothers and their infants is a strong predictor of the health of future generations. Favorable birth outcomes, early detection of health conditions, and strong support for maternal and child health (MCH) make children and their families more likely to thrive throughout the lifespan. Infant mortality is the death of an infant before their first birthday. Infant mortality remains a high concern throughout the United States, despite modern advancements in medicine and technology.

Infant mortality rate: the number of infant deaths per 1,000 live births.

Leading causes include:

- Birth Defects
- Sudden Infant Death Syndrome
- Preterm Birth
- Pregnancy Complications
- Low Birth Weight
- Injuries

Safe Sleep ²

A safe sleep environment reduces risk for sleep-related infant mortality. To create a safe sleep environment for infants:

- **Back to sleep.** Babies who sleep on their backs are much less likely to die of SIDS than babies who sleep on their sides or stomachs.
- **Remove soft bedding.** Keep soft bedding such as blankets, pillows, bumper pads, and soft toys away from your baby's sleep area.
- **Firm & flat surfaces.** Use a firm, flat sleep surface, such as a mattress in a safety-approved crib, covered only by a fitted sheet.

Sources:
1. CDC. Infant Mortality. <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternalinfanthealth/infantmortality.htm>; 2. CDC. Safe Sleep. [cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/features/baby-safe-sleep/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/features/baby-safe-sleep/index.html);
3. The US Black-White Infant Mortality Gap: Marker of Deep Inequities [ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5388980/](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5388980/); 4. Maryland Vital Statistics. 2018 Infant Mortality Report. health.maryland.gov/vsa/Documents/Infant_Mortality_Report_2018.pdf

MCH OVERVIEW & SERVICES*

# Live births, 2018	2,634
# Children under 5	14,064
# New insurance applications	1,997
# Healthy Families home visits completed	588
# MEGAN's Place care coordination encounters	750

*Harford County Health Department. Family Health Data. FY 2020.

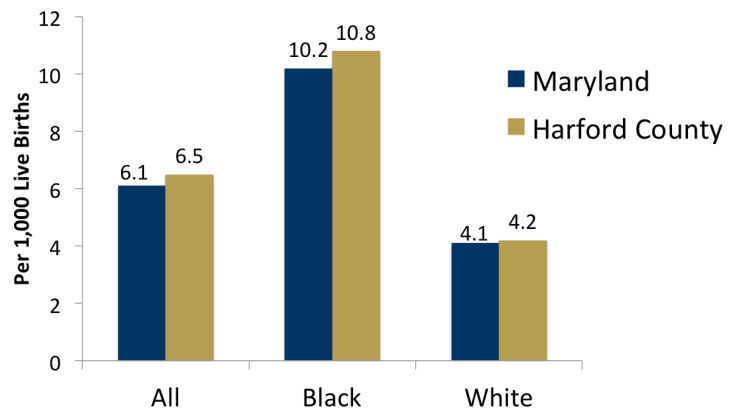
Health Disparities ³

A health disparity is a difference in health outcomes and their causes among groups of people. The United States holds the highest rates of infant mortality among comparable developed countries. It also has the starkest disparities in infant mortality between racial groups. The infant mortality rate for Black infants is twice that of non-Hispanic white infants throughout the United States. This disparity persists even when accounting for maternal income and education.

Potential solutions include:

- **Address institutionalized racism.** Research has linked racism and discrimination to disparities in infant mortality.
- **Expand maternal and child support services.** Access to comprehensive wraparound services improve maternal and child health outcomes.

Racial Disparities in Infant Mortality
Harford County, Maryland 2017 ⁴



Harford County's overall infant mortality rate is 6.5 deaths per 1,000 live births. This is higher than Maryland's rate (6.1). Significant racial disparities persist between Black and white infants. In 2018, the rate of infant mortality was significantly higher for Black infants (10.8) as compared to white non-Hispanic infants (4.2).