

Newborn Mortality in the United States¹

Donna Davis²

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While the United States boasts some of the finest healthcare facilities and services known to humankind, the country also has one of the highest newborn mortality rates in the industrialized world. In fact, according to the World Health Organization, the U.S. is tied for second to last (with Hungary, Malta, Poland and Slovakia), with 5 newborn deaths per 1,000 live births (World Health Organization 2005).

In a recent report published by the international humanitarian organization Save the Children, researchers explained that the causes of death among newborns in industrialized countries are very different than those in developing countries where almost “half of newborn deaths are due to infection, tetanus and diarrhea” (Save the Children, 2006, p. 37). In industrialized countries, newborns are more likely to die as a result of premature birth and low birthweight (MCHB 2003).

Most at risk are minorities, even when mothers have early and equal access to prenatal care. Black infants are 3.4 times more likely to die at birth than whites, while Hispanic infants have a 1.5 times higher infant mortality rate, and all other races other than white are 1.9 times higher (Healy et al. 2006).

So if these moms have the same care, researchers were puzzled by what factors are associated with infant mortality. When controlling for other known risk factors such as weight gain, alcohol, and tobacco use, race, weight prior to pregnancy and prenatal care (Berkowitz 1981), researchers at Princeton University and the Brookings Institute found one of the most significant risk factors was low socioeconomic status and educational levels (World

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2. Donna Davis, senior producer, Family Album Radio, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611.

Health Organization 2005). And while the reason why newborn mortality is higher among lower socioeconomic women in the U.S. is still unclear, many organizations are focusing on this group to seek solutions.

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To listen to the radio broadcast:

http://radiosource.net/radio_stories/437%20-%20newborn%20mortality.mp3

http://radiosource.net/radio_stories/437%20-%20newborn%20mortality.wav

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