

CDC's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* has published a new study: "**Racial Differences by Gestational Age in Neonatal Deaths Attributable to Congenital Heart Defects - United States, 2003-2006.**" You can read the article [here](#). See below for a summary of the findings from this article. Feel free to share this summary with your friends and colleagues or post it on your website.

**About congenital heart defects and this study:**

Congenital heart defects are conditions present at birth that can affect the way the heart works. They can cause lifelong disability or death. They are the most common type of birth defect, affecting nearly 40,000 births in the United States each year. They are also the leading cause of infant death due to birth defects. Infant death due to birth defects is highest during the first 27 days of life (also called the neonatal period).

This CDC study looked at the rate of death among babies younger than 28 days old (also called neonatal mortality) due to congenital heart defects by the mother's race and whether the baby was born preterm. Babies born before 37 weeks in pregnancy are considered preterm. Babies born at 37 weeks or later in pregnancy are considered term. For this study, researchers looked at information from birth and death certificates for babies born to US residents from 2003-2006.

**Important findings from this study include:**

- 4.2% of all deaths in the first 27 days of life were due to a congenital heart defect.
- Among infants born preterm, death rates during the first 27 days of life were lower among black infants compared with white infants.
- Among infants born at term, death rates during the first 27 days of life were higher among black infants compared with white infants.

In order to better understand these differences in infant death during the first 27 days of life due to congenital heart defects, more studies are needed. These studies should focus on differences in reporting the cause of death, differences in the prevalence of congenital heart defects (how common they are) at birth, and differences in prenatal diagnosis of congenital heart defects.

**Congenital Heart Defects: CDC's Activities**

CDC works to identify causes and prevention opportunities for congenital heart defects by applying a public health approach:

- Surveillance or disease tracking: Tracking where and when congenital heart defects occur and who they affect gives us important clues about opportunities for prevention.
- Research: CDC coordinates the largest population-based effort in the United States to identify the causes of birth defects, the [National Birth Defects Prevention Study](#). Population-based means that the researchers look at all babies with birth defects who live in the study regions. This study has identified some important risk factors for congenital heart defects. For example, women who are obese when they become pregnant are more likely to have a baby with a congenital heart defect.
- Prevention: Studying the occurrence of congenital heart defects in the population holds promise for identifying risk factors that can be translated into prevention strategies.
- Collaboration: CDC provides technical assistance to the [Congenital Heart Public Health Consortium](#), a unique collaboration that brings together families, experts, and organizations to address congenital heart defects.

To learn more about birth defects, please visit [www.cdc.gov/ncbddd](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd).

**Reference:**

CDC. Racial Differences by Gestational Age in Neonatal Deaths Attributable to Congenital Heart Defects - United States, 2003-2006. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR). 2010;59 (37):1208-1211.