

# Low Birth Weight

## DESCRIPTION

Birth weight is the first weight of a baby, taken after he or she is born. A low birth weight (LBW) is less than 5.5 pounds. A low birth weight baby can be born too small, too early (premature), or both. Babies born with LBW can have diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, and/or obesity later in life.<sup>1</sup> About one in 12 babies in the U.S. are born with LBW. LBW is often related to prematurity (less than 37 weeks gestation). Fetal growth restriction (also called growth-restricted, small for gestational age and small-for-date) is another reason for LBW. Growth-restricted babies may have LBW because their parents are small or because something slowed or stopped growth during pregnancy.

## HOW ARE WE DOING

In 2016, 5.8 percent of Ramsey County births of single babies were of low birth weight compared to 4.9 percent of Minnesota babies.<sup>2</sup> Considering all births (single and multiple), 7.3 percent of Ramsey County births were of low birth weight. Overall this meets the Healthy People 2020 goal, but not for all women of all races.

## BENCHMARK INDICATOR

Healthy People 2020: Reduce low birth weight  
U.S. Target: 7.8 percent of live births.<sup>3</sup>

## DISPARITIES

Although Ramsey County meets the Healthy People 2020 goal, there are large disparities for babies born to women of color. During 2014-2016, the percentage of LBW births for African-American women was 9.3 percent; 7.5 for American Indian residents; 7.4 percent for Asian/Asian Pacific Islander residents; 7.2 percent for Hispanic residents; and 6.4 percent for white residents. The percentage of LBW births is decreasing for African-American women, but rising for Hispanic women.<sup>4</sup>

## RISK FACTORS

There are many reasons a baby can be born with LBW. Women who deliver early, have chronic health conditions, infections, problems with their placenta, or have trouble gaining enough weight during pregnancy can have a LBW baby. Smoking, drinking alcohol, using street drugs and abusing prescription drugs can also cause a baby to be LBW. Pregnant women who smoke are twice as likely to have a LBW baby than nonsmokers. Also, mothers who have the following characteristics are at higher risk for low birth weight babies: have low education, low income, unemployed, non-white, or younger than 17 or older than 35.<sup>1</sup>

## WHAT RAMSEY COUNTY GOVERNMENT IS DOING

In late 2016, Saint Paul- Ramsey County Public Health became one of five groups in a national Birth Equity Institute, with the goal of decreasing infant mortality among African-American and American Indian women by intervening in contributing factors. Members of the Ramsey County Birth Equity Community Council, which includes county residents, community organizations, and representatives from Minnesota Departments of both Health and Human Services, determined in 2017 to focus on safe sleep messaging and parenting support for fathers.

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## Information to note

- African-American babies in Ramsey County are more likely to be born LBW than other babies, yet the percentage is decreasing.
- LBW births to Hispanic women are increasing.

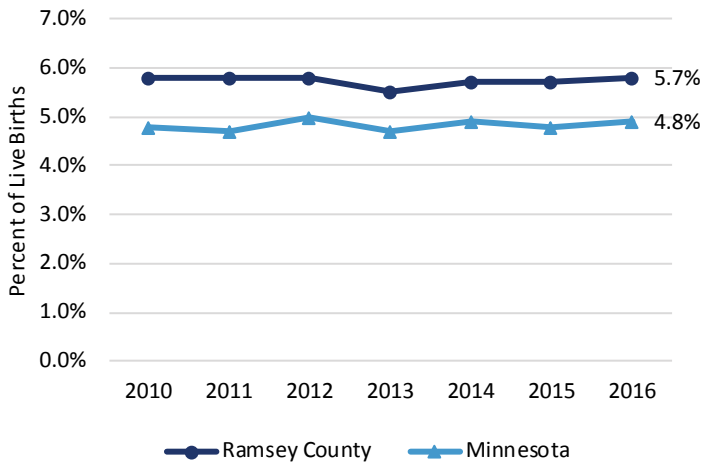
<sup>1</sup> Low Birthweight. March of Dimes. <https://www.marchofdimes.org/baby/low-birthweight.aspx>. Accessed October 27, 2017

<sup>2</sup> Minnesota Department of Health. MN County Health Tables. <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/chs/genstats/countyttables/index.htm>. Accessed February 7, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Maternal, Infant, and Child Health. Healthy People 2020. <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/maternal-infant-and-child-health/objectives>. Accessed October 27, 2017.

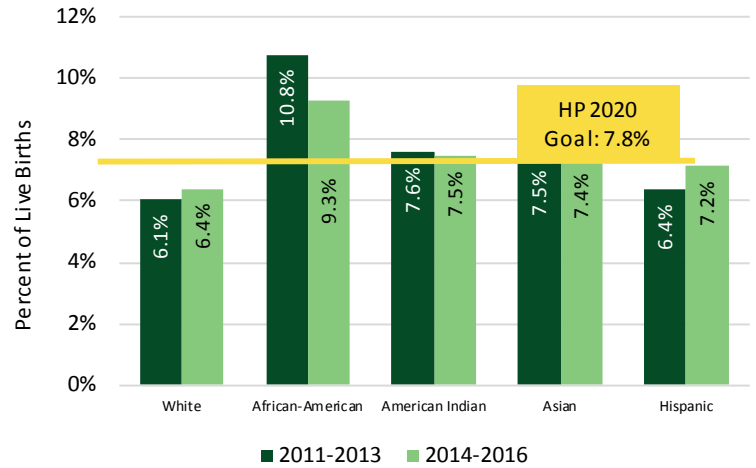
<sup>4</sup> Minnesota Center for Health Statistics. Birth Database 2011-2016. Minnesota Department of Health. <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/chs/>. Accessed August 2018.

### Low Birth Weight (Single Births) Over Time



Source: Minnesota Department of Health. MN County Health Tables.<sup>5</sup>

### Low Birth Weight, Ramsey County



Source: Minnesota Department of Health Center for Health Statistics.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Minnesota Department of Health. MN County Health Tables. <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/chs/countytables/>. Accessed February 7, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Minnesota Department of Health Center for Health Statistics.