

**Infant Mortality Briefing Document**  
**Presented to the Governor's Interagency Council on Health Disparities**  
**September 20, 2007**

**Infant mortality** is defined as deaths of children less than one year of age. From 2003-2005, the top three causes of infant mortality in Washington State were birth defects (27%), sudden infant death syndrome (11%), and preterm birth (10%).

**CRITERION #1: PREVALENCE / INCIDENCE**

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- In 2005, 420 infants died in their first year of life in Washington State; the infant mortality rate was 5.1 deaths per 1,000 live births.
- The infant mortality rate in Washington decreased significantly from 11.8 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1980 to 5.8 in 1995. Since then, the rate of decline has slowed.
- The infant mortality rate has been consistently lower in Washington than in the U.S.

**CRITERION #2: SEVERITY**

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- As a measure of mortality, by definition, infant mortality is severe.

**CRITERION #3: DISPARITY**

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- Infant mortality rates (per 1,000 live births) by race and ethnicity for 2003-2005 combined were about twice as high for American Indians/Alaska Natives (9.7) and blacks (8.9) as for whites (4.7). The rates for Hispanics and Asians and Pacific Islanders were 4.8 and 3.8, respectively. The Index of Disparity was 85%.
- While the infant mortality rate is lower in Washington State than in the nation, the rate for American Indians in Washington is higher than the rate for American Indians nationwide.
- In 2004, the rate for Pacific Islanders (8.9) was nearly double the rate for Asians (4.6).
- Among Hispanics, national data reveal that the infant mortality rate among Puerto Rican mothers (8.2) was higher than among women of Mexican origin (5.5), Central and South American origin (5.0) and Cuban origin (4.6)
- The infant mortality rate due to prematurity (one of the top three causes of infant mortality) is three times higher among African Americans than the rate for non-Hispanic whites. African American women have twice the prevalence of very low birthweight babies; which comprise less than 1% of all births but account for 44% of all infant deaths.
- African American and American Indian women experience greater risk factors for infant mortality, such as smoking, obesity, and high stress, and therefore, begin pregnancy less healthy than other groups.

**The Index of Disparity** is the average of the difference in rates between the racial/ethnic group with the "best" rate and all other racial/ethnic groups.

*Keppel KG et al., Measuring progress in healthy people 2010. Statistical Notes, no 25. NCHS, 2004*

Sources: (1) Washington State Department of Health (2006). Infant Mortality. In: MCH Data Report 2006. (2) Matthews et al., 2006. Infant Mortality Statistics from the 2003 Period Linked Birth/Infant Death Data Set. National Vital Statistics Reports, Volume 54, Number 16. National Center for Health Statistics. (3) Infant Death Data. Center for Health Statistics, Washington State Department of Health. Accessed from [http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehsphi/chs/chs-data/infdeath/inf\\_VD.htm](http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehsphi/chs/chs-data/infdeath/inf_VD.htm) on 4/2/2007. (4) Wasserman, 2006. Race/Ethnic Disparities in Infant Mortality. Presentation to Washington State Board of Health, December 13, 2006. (5) Preliminary data from: Washington State Department of Health (2007). Health of Washington State. 2007. Olympia, WA. *In press*