Birth Defects in Rhode Island

Every year in Rhode Island, about 33 out of 1000 babies are born with a birth defect.

Birth defects are structural changes present at birth that can affect almost any part of the body. They may affect how the body looks, works, or both. A doctor may find a birth defect before birth, at birth, or any time after birth. The most common birth defects in Rhode Island are problems with the heart, muscles, or bones.

The cause of most birth defects is unknown.

Many times, birth defects are caused by more than one thing. Some things that we know can increase the risk of a child having a birth defect are drinking alcohol or smoking during pregnancy; having someone in your family with a birth defect (genetics); uncontrolled medical conditions, such as diabetes; certain medications; and chemicals in the environment.

The Rhode Island Birth Defects Program (RIBDP) tracks the number of babies born with birth defects each year and tries to better understand the causes of birth defects.

Hospitals and doctors report birth defects to help the RIBDP look at who is more likely to have a birth defect. The RIBDP uses this information to focus on reducing birth defects and addressing differences between groups of people (disparities).

Birth defects are common, critical, and costly.

Early identification of birth defects and access to services can result in better outcomes as the child gets older. This may include having fewer and shorter hospital stays.

The RIBDP wants to make sure that families of children with birth defects get the referrals and services they need in a timely manner.

Families can fill out an assessment form, which are condition-specific, to tell RIBDP about the services they have or have not received. The RIBDP uses findings from service assessments to determine gaps in service referrals and supports and helps connect families with local resources and services.

For more information on the RIBDP program, please visit
http://www.health.ri.gov/programs/detail.php?pgm_id=121