

U.S. among worst for infant deaths

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The rate at which infants die in the United States has dropped substantially over the past half-century, but broad disparities remain among racial groups, and the country stacks up poorly next to other industrialized nations.

In 2004, the most recent year for which statistics are available, roughly seven babies died for every 1,000 live births before reaching their first birthday, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says. That was down from about 26 in 1960.

Babies born to black mothers died at two and a half times the rate of those born to white mothers, according to the CDC figures.

The United States ranks near the bottom for infant survival rates among modernized nations. A Save the Children report last year placed the United States ahead of only Latvia, and tied with Hungary, Malta, Poland and Slovakia.

The same report noted the United States had more neonatologists and newborn intensive care beds per person than Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom – but still had a higher rate of infant mortality than any of those nations.

Doctors and analysts blame broad disparities in access to health care among racial and income groups in the United States.

Not surprisingly, the picture is far bleaker in poorer countries, particularly in Africa. A 2005 World Health Organization report found infant mortality rates as high as 144 per 1,000 births – more than 20 times the U.S. rate – in Liberia.