



# Infant Mortality: A Massachusetts Disparity Among African Americans

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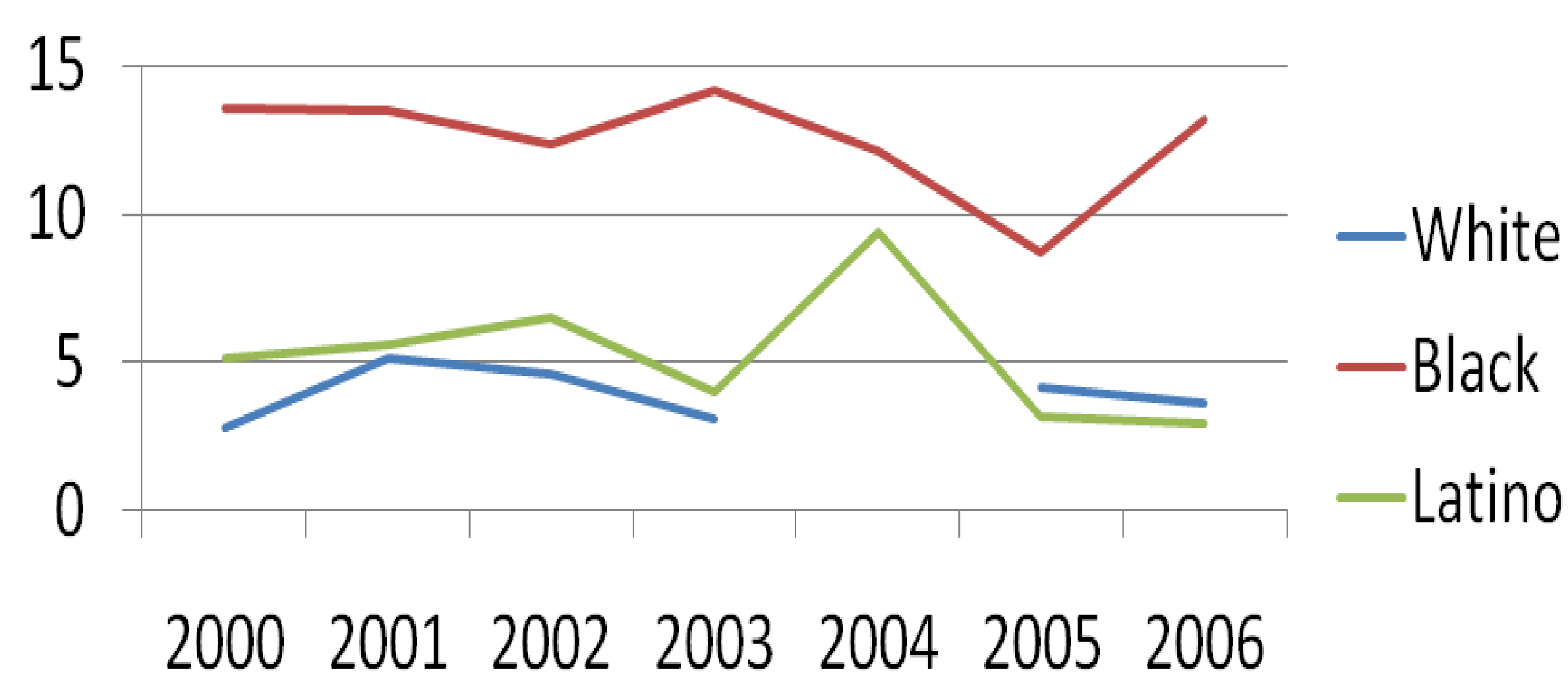
## Infant Mortality

Infant mortality is the death of a child under a year of age. The infant mortality rate is the number of deaths for children under a year of age divided by the number of live births that year.

## Infant Mortality as a Disparity

Infant mortality affects every race, but blacks suffer from an unusually high infant mortality rate compared to other races. Blacks have the highest rate of infant mortality in the United States of America. In 2007 the infant mortality rate for blacks in Massachusetts was 2.6 times higher than whites. Blacks suffered 10.2 deaths/ 1,000 live births, where whites experienced 3.9 deaths/ 1,000 live births.

## Infant Mortality Rate by Ethnicity Boston, 2000-2006



## Leading Causes of Infant Mortality

### 1. Congenital Malformation

This is the delayed development of a structure during early embryonic life, which results in a permanent physical defect at birth. A cleft lip or downs syndrome are some examples of such defects.

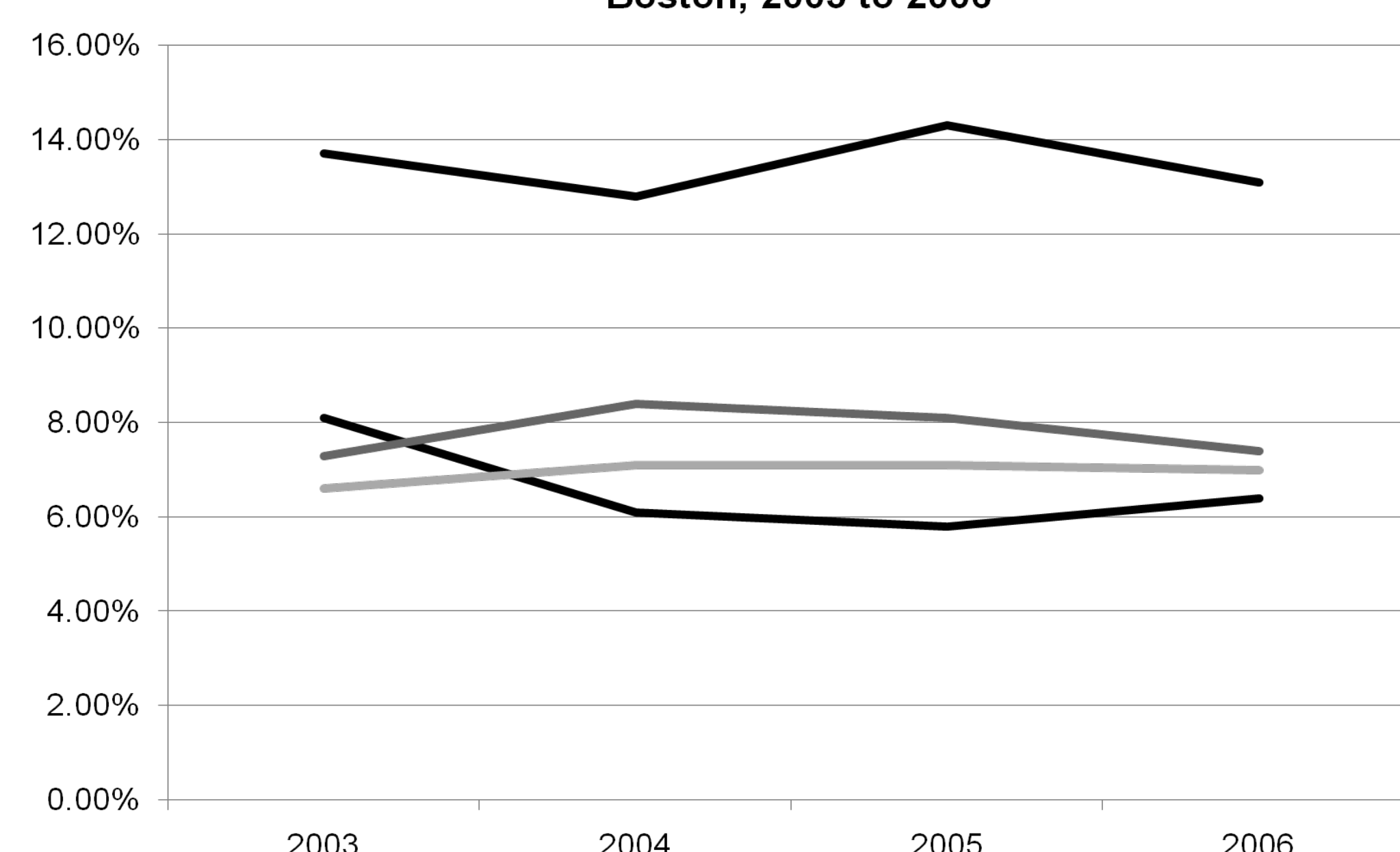
### 2. Low Birth Weight

This is when a baby is born weighing less than 5pounds, 5ounces. This occurs in both premature babies and babies who are born at the regular time. Babies born under these conditions can suffer from breathing problems, heart problems, and liver problems. They can also be anemic (too few red blood cells), polycythemic (too many red blood cells), or have trouble maintaining normal body temperature.

### 3. Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)

The sudden, unexplained death of an infant under a year of age. Infants are at high risk for SIDS if they are put to sleep on their tummy or side as opposed to their back. In preventing SIDS, when putting an infant to bed avoid overdressing them and giving them toys, a pillow, or loose bedding.

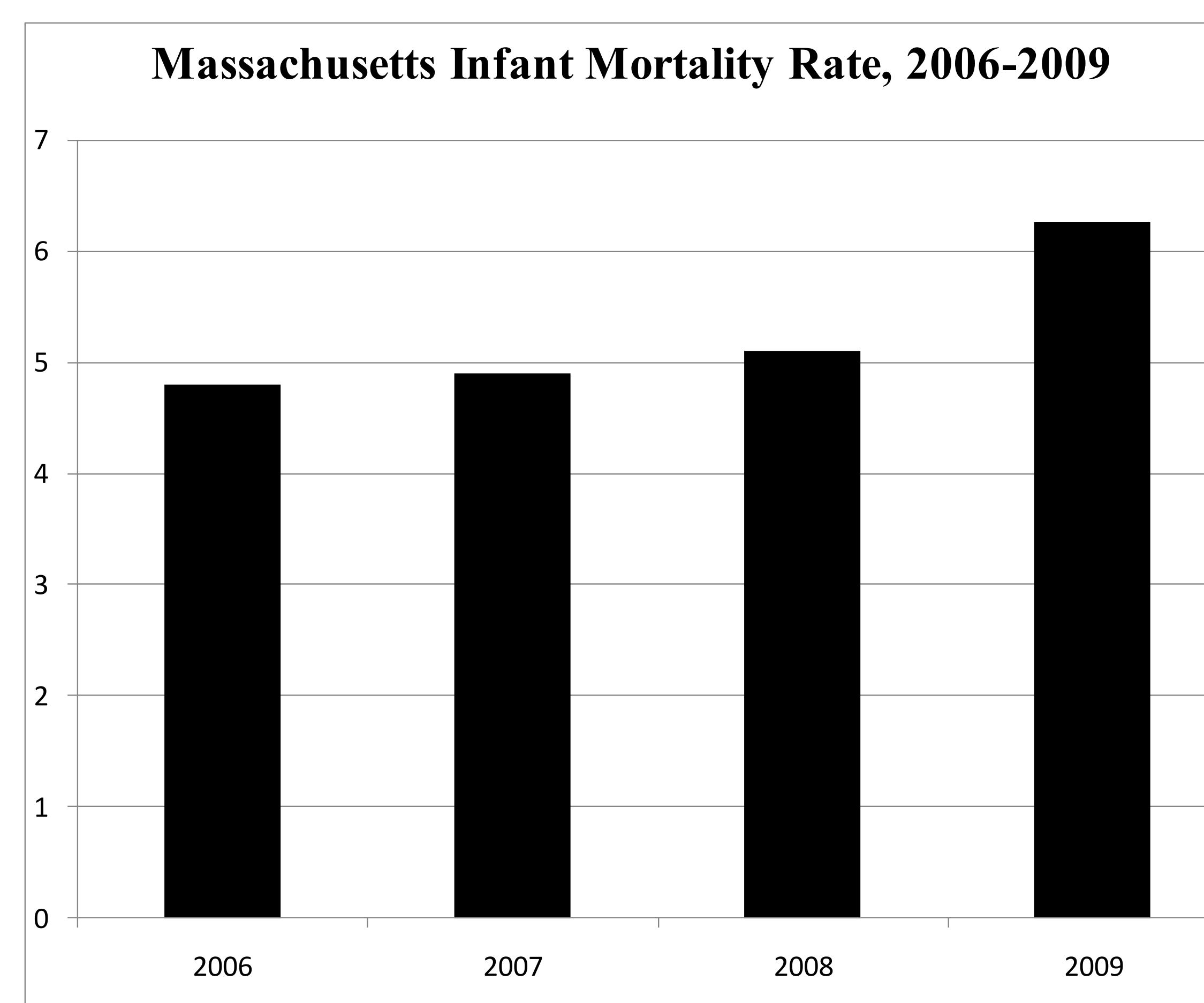
## Rate of Low Birth Weight Births by Race/Ethnicity Boston, 2003 to 2006



## Factors Affecting Infant Mortality

1. Late prenatal care
2. Low maternal weight gain
3. A lack of access to health care
4. Lack of exercise during pregnancy
5. Poor nutrition
6. Substance abuse

Among these factors, prenatal care is a serious issue for the black population. This is because Medicaid is more common amongst blacks, as opposed to whites, and not many doctors are willing to accept Medicaid patients. As a result, black mothers receive late prenatal care. Prenatal care, especially within the first trimester, is essential for the infant's wellbeing. It is important to receive prenatal care as soon as possible to reduce the risk of birth defects and complications that can lead to infant mortality. Congenital malformation and low birth weight are examples of such defects and complications.



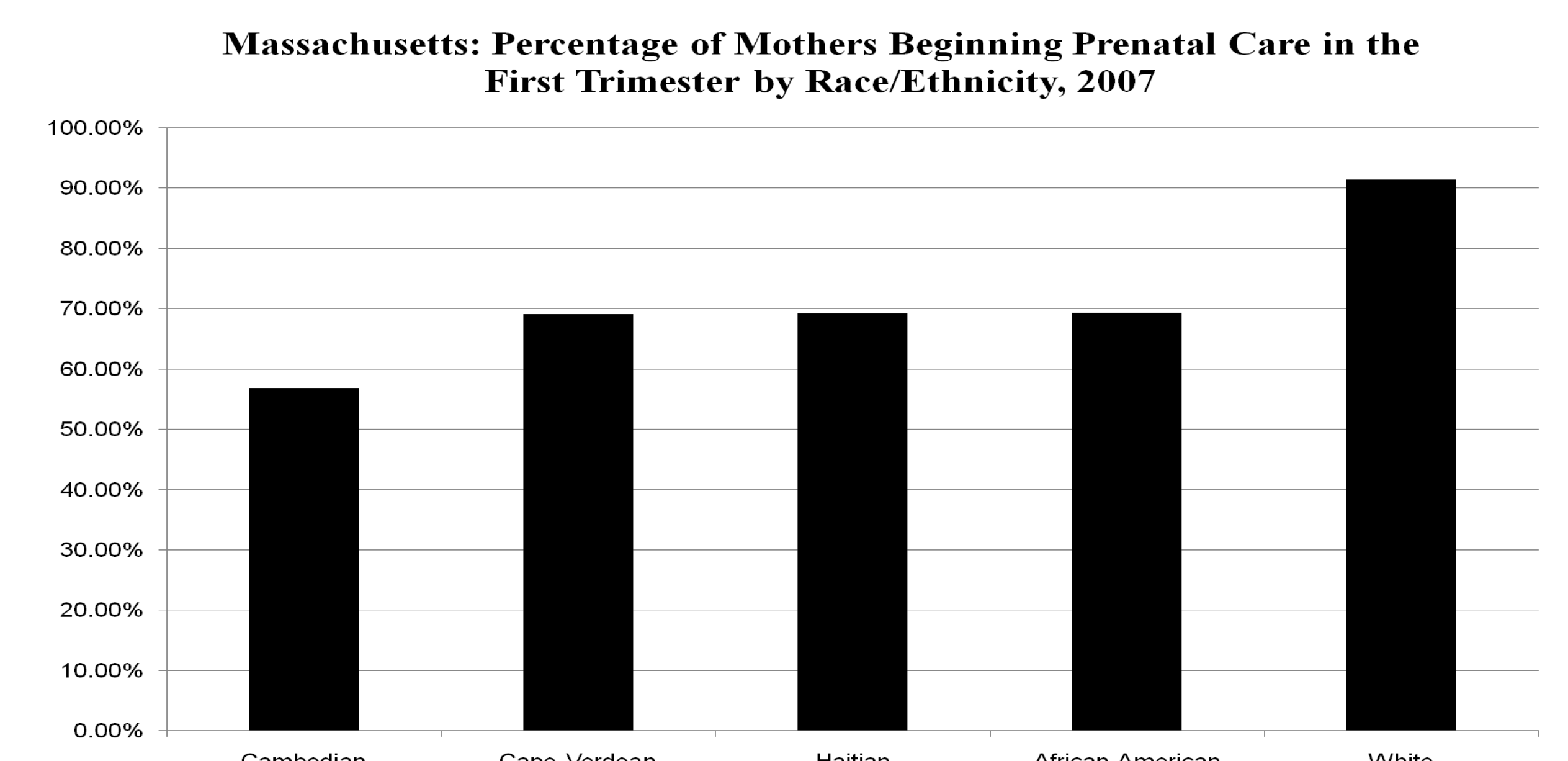
## Worcester: Massachusetts' Highest Infant Mortality Rate

### Infant Mortality Rate, Worcester MA

With an infant mortality rate of 6.6 deaths/ 1,000 live births in 2004 to 13.9 deaths/ 1,000 live births in 2005, Worcester's infant mortality rate more than doubled. According to the Department of Public Health, Worcester has the highest infant mortality rate in the state of Massachusetts.

### Population Affected, Worcester MA

The Worcester Infant Mortality Reduction Task Force determined that the majority of infant deaths were those born to immigrant women from Western Africa, mainly Ghana. Further, the Community Health Clerkship group, from the University of Massachusetts Medical School, found that the Ghanaian infant deaths were linked to cultural beliefs. In their culture, Ghanaians don't view pregnancy as a medical condition, which means they don't seek prenatal care. Further, a lack of prenatal care leads to infant mortality.



## Prevention

1. Inform
2. Life -style changes
3. Community support

The main course of prevention is for both health care providers and communities to encourage pregnant women and parents of infants to develop healthy behaviors. Parents need to be aware of the factors that affect birth outcomes.

## Programs that Aid in Reducing Infant Mortality Rate

### PRAMS

The Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System. This is a surveillance project that collects data on maternal attitudes before, during, and right after pregnancy from populations within a given state.

### WIC

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children. This program teaches its clients about nutrition and health, in a effort to improve the diets of pregnant women and infants. It also educates its clients on the importance of health care and refers them to sources of care in the community.

## References

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