



Saving Babies through Birth Defects Research & Prevention

One in every 33 babies in the United States is born with a birth defect. Birth defects are a leading cause of infant deaths. These are two powerful statements. Our work begins before a child is conceived and continues throughout life. We're using our research to find ways to prevent birth defects and to improve the health of babies born with them. From our research we know that a woman's health before, during, and between pregnancies can affect the health of her baby. That's why we created a wealth of information on issues like folic acid, diabetes, smoking, obesity, drinking alcohol, and medication use during pregnancy. CDC has a unique and critical role in the national effort to address birth defects through state-based tracking and public health research. It is through our collaborations with states, academic centers, and other partners that we turn this information into action that prevents birth defects and improves the lives of those affected.

Kristine's Story

After a healthy and normal pregnancy, I gave birth to my daughter, Cora, on November 30, 2009. Two days later we took her home, after getting a clean bill of health at the hospital. The next three days were spent cuddling and getting to know each other.

One morning my husband handed Cora to me because she seemed hungry. I started feeding her and looked up at my husband to tell him I loved him. When I looked back down, Cora was pale, gray, and not breathing. We raced to the hospital, which was no more than 5 minutes away, but it was too late. Cora was gone. The coroner told us that she died from an undetected congenital heart defect. Neither of us had heard of the term.

We later learned about a type of screening—pulse oximetry—that can help identify certain heart defects at birth. While we'll never know if the screening would have made a difference for Cora, we wish she'd had it. Cora's story is extremely sad, but it's also full of hope. In Indiana, where we live, a new law requiring the screening with pulse oximetry is named after her and is known as Cora's Law.

For now, I hope for a day when no mother finds out about her child's heart defect from a coroner. I hope that undetected congenital heart defects become a thing of the past. And ultimately, I hope that these birth defects can be prevented and that no baby is born with a broken heart.

