



Questions and Answers about Birth Defects in Kettleman City 2009-2011 Update

In February 2010, the California Birth Defects Monitoring Program (CBDMP), a program within the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) released the report “Birth Defects in Kettleman City” in response to community concerns about a possible increase in birth defects in Kettleman City. The report covered birth defect cases in Kettleman City, Avenal, Kings County and five Central Valley counties (Kings, Fresno, Kern, Madera and Tulare) for birth years 1987-2008. As follow up to a commitment made to the community, CDPH is releasing an update titled “Birth Defects in Kettleman City and Surrounding Areas 2009-2011 Update.”

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Have the birth defects decreased or increased in Kettleman City since 2009?

In the two most recent years (2010 and 2011), the birth defects rate for Kettleman City has been lower than in 2008 and 2009. Although we are still collecting data for births in 2010 and 2011, we have seen the rates of birth defects in Kettleman City returning to the lower levels or rates seen before 2008. A rate compares the

number of children born with birth defects to the total number of children born in the same area.

How many birth defects cases has CDPH collected since 2009 for Kettleman City?

Five cases of children with structural birth defects were identified in Kettleman City over the three-year period from 2009-2011. The data for births in 2010 and 2011 are preliminary. Data collection for births occurring in 2010 and 2011 will be ongoing until approximately June 2012 and June 2013, respectively.

SUMMARY

- The rates of birth defects in Kettleman City in 2010 and 2011 appear to be returning to the rates seen prior to 2008.
- CDPH has reviewed the Birth Defects Registry data collected from Kettleman City and has not found a common cause for the birth defects.
- CDPH will continue to monitor birth defects in Kettleman City and Kings County.

How is information being collected about birth defects in Kettleman City?

We review the medical records of all live births and pregnancy losses from hospitals, clinics, genetics offices, and certain laboratories in the counties we monitor.

We collect information through the first year of a baby's life because some birth defects are not recognized until months after the baby is born. However, the Birth Defects Registry does not include all conditions. Examples include autism, low birth weight, some types of mental retardation and cerebral palsy, and certain types of inherited diseases (e.g., muscular dystrophy).

It is important to note that information about Kettleman City in the Birth Defects Registry only includes cases of babies whose mothers had a home address in Kettleman City at the time of birth.

Is the number of birth defects in Kettleman City higher than in other areas of the county?

The rate of birth defects in Kettleman City over time is comparable to other communities we monitor. Sometimes we find increases and decreases in birth defects for no apparent reason. For example, during time periods 1992-1999, 2002-2005 the two-year prevalence rates in Kettleman City were lower than the other areas. During the time periods 1987-1991, 2000-2001, and 2006-2011, the two-year prevalence rates were higher than the other areas. The rates in the two most recent years (2010 and 2011) appear to be returning to the lower rates seen in Kettleman City prior to 2008-2009.

What caused the increase of birth defects in Kettleman City in 2008 and 2009?

The extensive investigation of the birth defects that the CDPH and the California Environmental

Protection Agency conducted in 2010 did not find a specific explanation or cause for the increase in birth defects. We will continue monitoring birth defects in Kettleman City and Kings County.

CDPH agreed to help Kettleman City get a new source of drinking water. When is that going to happen?

CDPH has been working with the local water district (the Kettleman City Community Services District, or KCCSD) and Kings County to find a solution to ensure drinking water meets all standards. The initial planning work has been completed. The next step will involve studies to make the final selection of the most cost-effective treatment process that minimizes future Operation and Maintenance (O&M) costs. At the same time, the county will be working with KCCSD to identify long term support for operation expenses. When these issues have been addressed, CDPH will be working with KCCSD on construction funding agreement. A critical issue for the construction funding is affordability, or what it will cost the community to operate the treatment system once it is built.

Where can I get more information or ask questions about birth defects in Kettleman City or in other areas of Kings County?

To learn more about birth defects, please visit the Birth Defects Registry website at www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/CBDMP. Questions related to birth defects in Kettleman City or Kings County can be directed to mchinet@cdph.ca.gov (include CBDMP or birth defects in the subject line), or contact Tivo Rojas-Cheatham at (510) 620-3673. You can find a copy of these reports at the Kettleman City post office, elementary school, community center, and the branch library.