

# State of American Childbirth

## A BirthNet Fact Sheet

**Pregnancy and childbirth are normal, healthy processes for the majority of women and babies.**

***Scope and scale of maternity care – each year in the United States:***

- ◆ Over 4 million births
- ◆ 99% in hospitals
- ◆ Second most common reason for hospitalization
- ◆ Most common reason for the hospitalization of women
- ◆ Care for mothers and babies combined rank fourth 4th in hospital expenses
- ◆ 90% attended by surgeons
- ◆ Over 6 million obstetric procedures performed -- most common category of surgical procedures
- ◆ Four of the eight most common surgical procedures performed in the United States are obstetric

**Nearly all women giving birth in hospitals are subjected to some level of technological or medical intervention.**

**The most common interventions are:**

- ◆ Over 26% (1 million) cesarean births via major abdominal surgery – highest ever
- ◆ Over 35% (1.4 million) of labors medically induced
- ◆ Over 50% (2 million) of labors artificially stimulated
- ◆ Over 65% (2.6 million) denied drink
- ◆ Over 70% (2.8 million) restrained in bed
- ◆ Over 85% (3.4 million) denied food
- ◆ 80% (3.2 million) given drugs for pain relief
- ◆ Nearly 90% (3.6 million) of women attached to electronic fetal monitor
- ◆ Vaginal Birth after Cesarean (VBAC) rate has fallen 55% since 1996 – access disappearing

**What do we have to show for all this intervention?**

***Outcomes in the United States:***

- ◆ High infant mortality rate – Rose in 2002 for the first time since 1958  
27th in the world, twice that of most other developed countries
- ◆ Maternal mortality rate that has not improved in 20 years – 15th in the world
- ◆ Over 40% (1.6 million) maternal morbidity rate
- ◆ Over 7% (280,000) of infants low birth weight – highest in 30 years
- ◆ 12% (480,000) of births preterm – highest in 20 years
- ◆ 30% (900,000) of women with some symptoms of post-traumatic stress
- ◆ High rates of postpartum depression

**Midwives are specialists in normal birth.**

Countries with better outcomes for mothers and babies and lower costs rely on midwives to attend most births – and many support out-of-hospital birth.

The Midwives Model of Care and Mother-Friendly Childbirth Initiative promote wellness, education, and individualized, woman-centered care.

**Midwives are key to effective, affordable Mother-Friendly Care.**

References available upon request



**BirthNet**  
Educating the public to improve  
maternity care for all women

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