

Health E-Stat 104: Trends in Early-term Singleton Births in the United States, 2014 to 2023

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The risk of infant mortality and long-term morbidity is lower for early-term births (births delivered at 37 and 38 weeks) than for infants delivered at shorter gestational ages but is higher than for those delivered later in pregnancy (1–3). Births delivered at 37 weeks are twice as likely as those born at 38 weeks and three times as likely as those born at 39 and 40 weeks to die in the first month of life (4). The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommends delivery at 39 weeks or later, but also notes that there are several complications for which early-term delivery is warranted (5). This report presents changes in early-term births from 2014 to 2023 overall and by maternal age, and the percentage of early-term births for which labor was induced.

Among all births, the percentage of infants delivered preterm increased 13% from 2014 to 2023, from 7.74% to 8.71% (Figure 1, Table 1). The percentage of early-term births rose 22% from 2014 to 2023, from 24.31% to 29.64%, with increases of 47% for births at 37 weeks (from 8.17% to 12.05%) and 9% for births at 38 weeks (from 16.13% to 17.58%). In contrast with increases in births delivered at less than 39 weeks from 2014 to 2023, full-term births declined 7% (from 60.76% to 56.68%). Late and post-term births declined by almost one-third, from 7.20% to 4.97%.

Early-term births increased 21% for mothers younger than 30, from 24.22% to 29.30% from 2014 to 2023 with increases of 44% for births at 37 weeks (8.11% to 11.70%) and 9% for births at 38 weeks (16.11% to 17.60%) (Figure 2, Table 2). For mothers age 30 and older, early-term births increased 23% from 2014 to 2023 (from 24.42% to 29.96%), 50% for births at 37 weeks (8.25% to 12.39%), and 9% for births at 38 weeks (16.17% to 17.57%).

The percentage of early-term births for which labor was induced increased 77% from 2014 to 2023, from 17.7% to 31.3% (Figure 3, Table 3). The percentage of births induced at 37 weeks rose 81%, from 20.7% to 37.4%, and the percentage at 38 weeks rose by 68%, from 16.1% to 27.0%.



Source and methods

This report is based on birth certificate data from the National Vital Statistics System (NVSS) data files and includes births in singleton deliveries only. Provisional and final NVSS data may also be accessed through CDC WONDER (6). Gestational age is based on the obstetric estimate of gestation. Preterm is less than 37 completed weeks, early term is 37–38 weeks, full term is 39–40 weeks, and late and post-term is 41 weeks and later. Induction of labor is defined as the initiation of uterine contractions by medical or surgical means for the purpose of delivery before the spontaneous onset of labor (that is, before labor has begun) (7). These data do not differentiate between medically indicated and nonmedically indicated early-term deliveries.

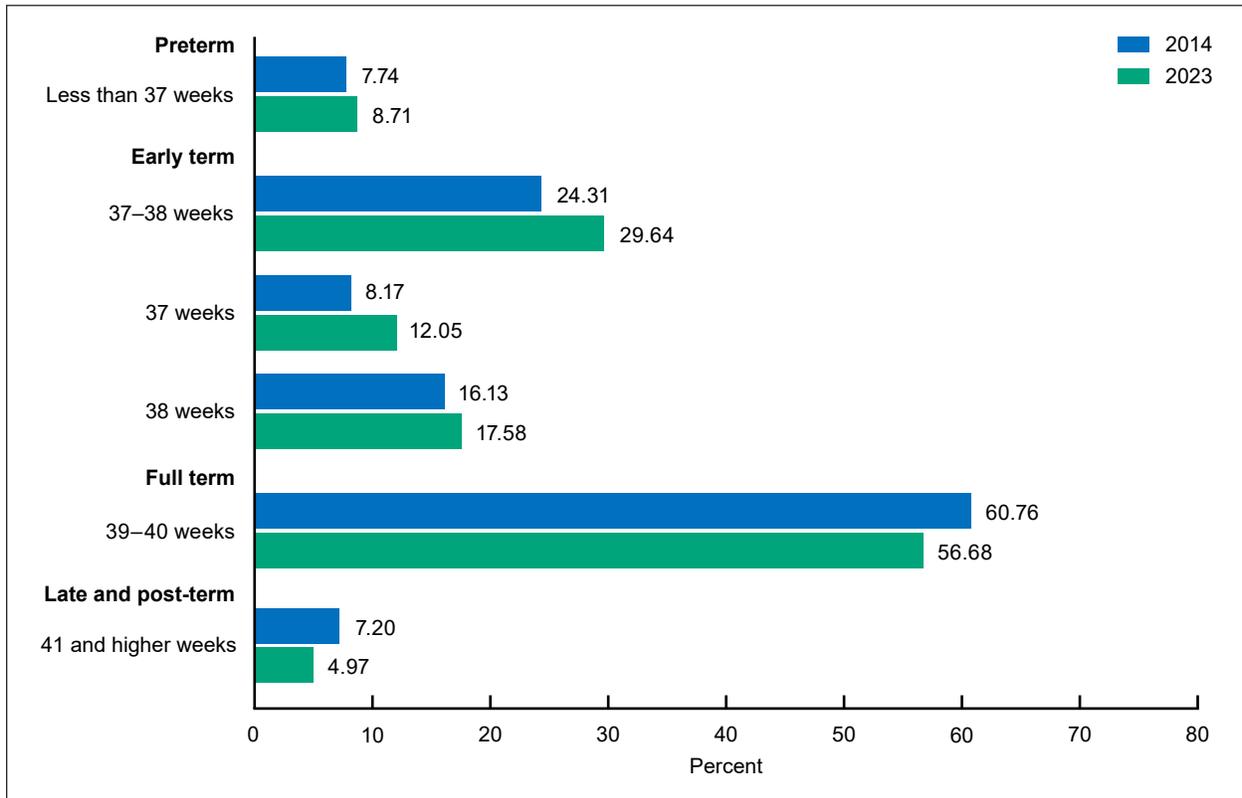
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Suggested citation

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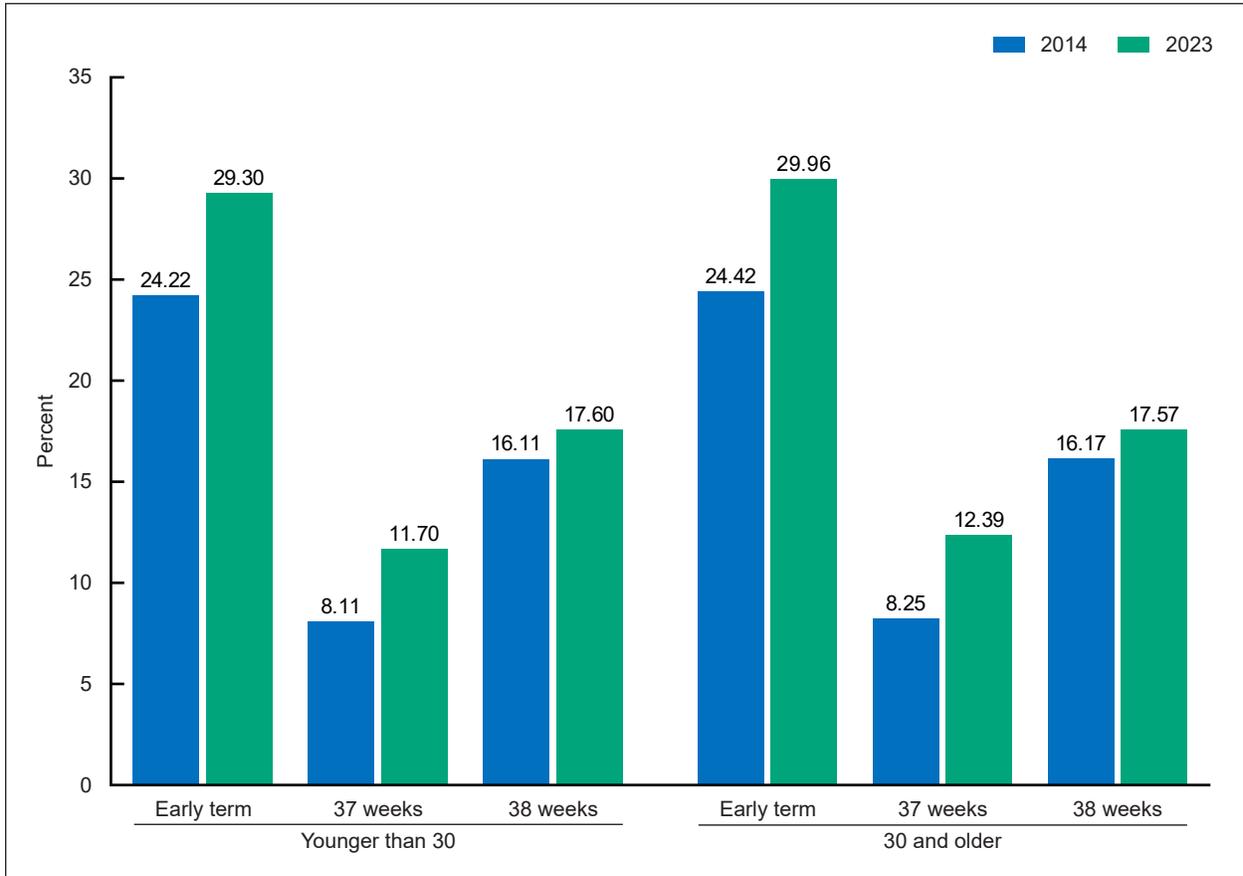
Figure 1. Percentage of births, by gestational age: United States, 2014 and 2023



NOTES: Significant differences between 2014 and 2023 for each gestational age category ($p < 0.05$). Data are for singleton births only. Gestational age is based on the obstetric estimate.

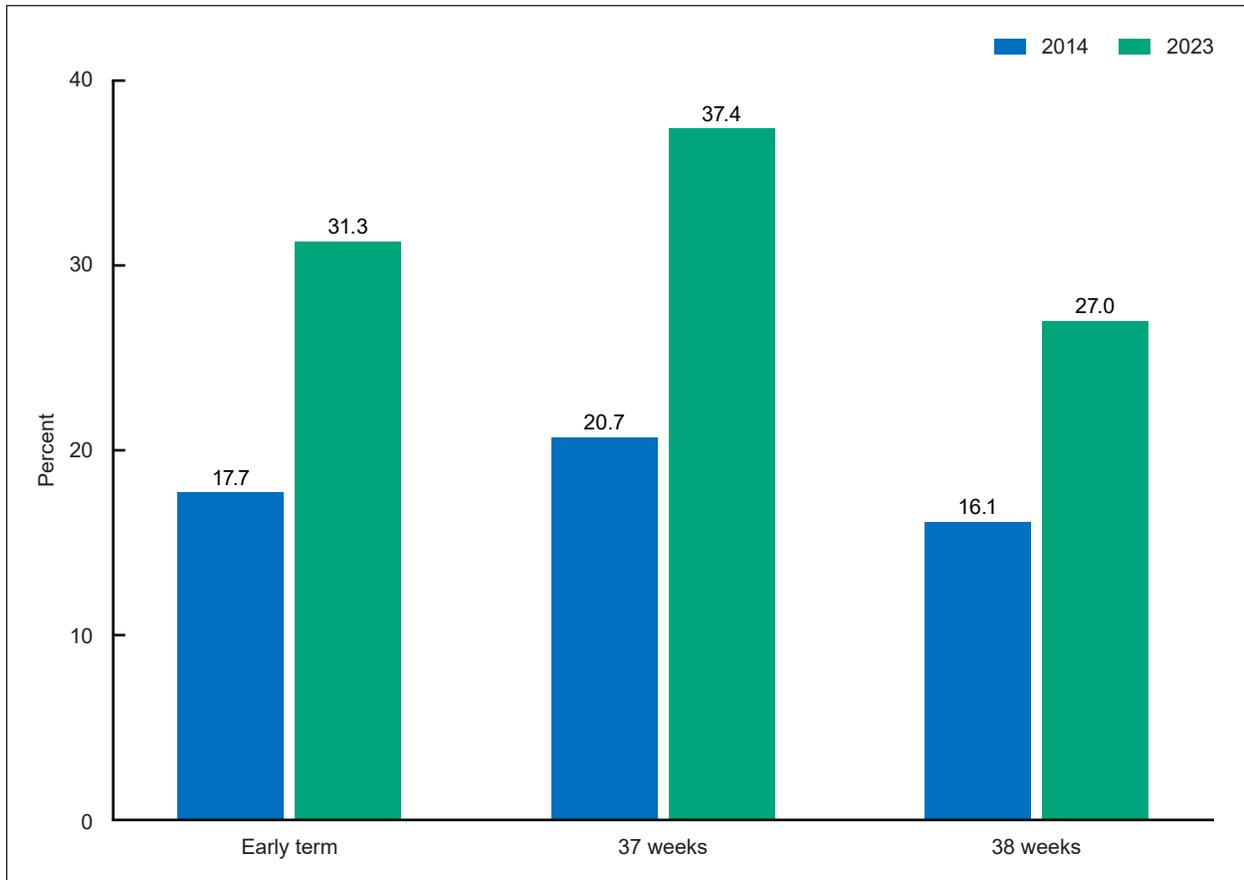
SOURCE: National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System, natality data file.

Figure 2. Percentage of early-term births, by age of mother: United States, 2014 and 2023



NOTES: Significant increases for each age group ($p < 0.05$). Singleton births only. Early-term is births at 37 and 38 completed weeks.
 SOURCE: National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System, natality data file.

Figure 3. Percentage of early-term births for which labor was induced: United States, 2014 and 2023



NOTES: Significant increases for each gestational age category ($p < 0.05$). Singleton births only. Early term is births at 37 and 38 completed weeks of gestation.
 SOURCE: National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System, natality data file.

Table 1. Percent distribution of births, by gestational age: 2014 and 2023

Gestational age (weeks)	2014	2023
Preterm	7.74	8.71
Early term	24.31	29.64
37	8.17	12.05
38	16.13	17.58
Full term	60.76	56.68
Late and post-term	7.20	4.97

NOTES: Significant differences between 2014 and 2023 for each gestational age category. Data are for singleton births only. Gestational age is based on the obstetric estimate of gestation in completed weeks. Preterm is less than 37 weeks, early term is 37 and 38 weeks, full term is 39 and 40 weeks, and late and post-term is 41 weeks and higher.

SOURCE: National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System, natality data file.

Table 2. Percentage of early-term births, by age of mother: United States, 2014 and 2023

Age of mother and gestational age of infant (weeks)	2014	2023
Younger than 30		
Early term	24.22	29.30
37	8.11	11.70
38	16.11	17.60
30 and older		
Early term	24.42	29.96
37	8.25	12.39
38	16.17	17.57

NOTES: Significant increases for each age group ($p < 0.05$). Data are for singleton births only. Early term is births at 37 and 38 completed weeks of gestation.

SOURCE: National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System, natality data file.

Table 3. Percentage of early term births for which labor was induced: 2014 and 2023

Gestational age (weeks)	2014	2023
Early term	17.7	31.3
37	20.7	37.4
38	16.1	27.0

NOTES: Significant increases for each gestational age category ($p < 0.05$). Data are for singleton births only. Early term is births at 37 and 38 completed weeks of gestation.

SOURCE: National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System, natality data file.