



## National Center for Health Statistics

# Longer Hospital Stays For Childbirth

According to data from the [National Hospital Discharge Survey](#), after decreasing from 3.8 days in 1980 to 2.1 days in 1995, the average length of a hospital stay for childbirth increased to 2.4 days in 1997. This increase was due to a reduction in the number of very short stays for childbirth.

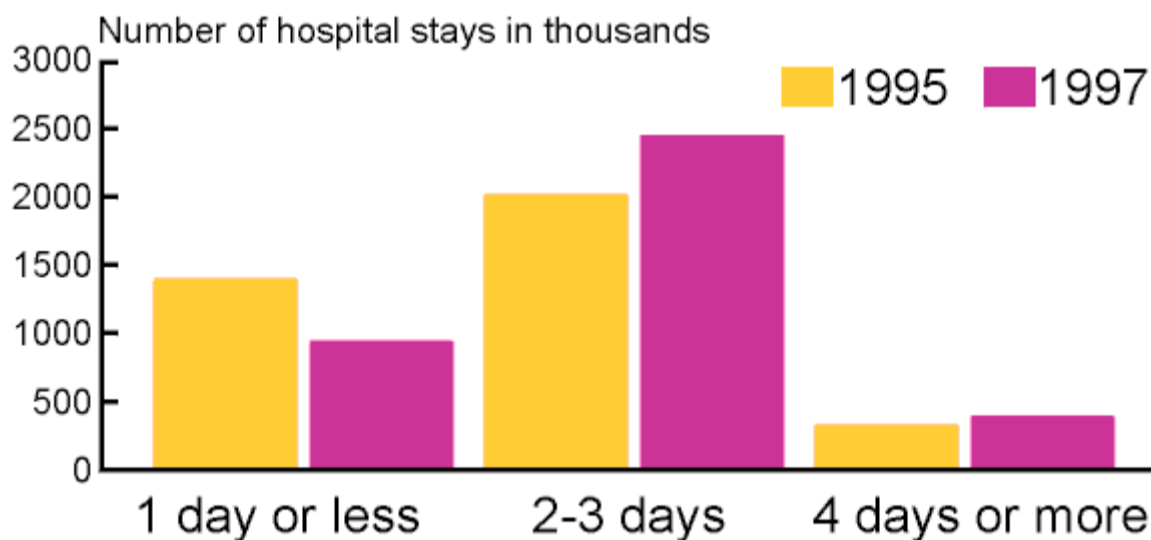
The number of women hospitalized for 1 day or less for childbirth dropped from 1.4 million (37%) in 1995 to 951,000 (25%) in 1997. Stays of 2-3 days increased from 2.0 million (54%) to 2.5 million (64%) during this period. Those with vaginal deliveries accounted for almost the entire decrease in stays of 1 day or less and increase in stays of 2-3 days. Women with cesarean deliveries had an increased number of 4-day stays.

Declining hospital stays for childbirth have received widespread publicity, and questions have been raised about whether short stays, especially stays of 1 day or less, were endangering the health of mothers and babies. Beginning in 1995, a number of States began passing legislation that required insurance plans to cover minimum stays for deliveries. Federal legislation was enacted in 1996 that prohibited insurers from restricting hospital stays for mothers and newborn infants to less than 2 days for vaginal deliveries or 4 days for cesarean deliveries. Although the Federal legislation did not become effective until January 1, 1998, the State laws and changes in insurance coverage in anticipation of the Federal law may have led to the longer stays.

- [Decreasing Hospital Use for HIV](#)
- [News Release](#)

Figure 1

## Length of hospitalization for childbirth



SOURCE: CDC/NCHS: National Hospital Discharge Survey, 1995-97