

# Variation in Birth Spacing by Maternal Characteristics

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Most American parents have at least two children, and spacing between children's births is associated with maternal and child health (Conde-Agudelo, Rosas-Bermudez, Castano, and Norton, 2012). In this profile, we use the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) to examine spacing between births (the number of months between two consecutive births) among American mothers aged 15-44 in 2013. We present median spacing for second and third births by mother's age, race-ethnicity, and completed education. This profile is a companion piece to FP-17-13, Variation in Birth Spacing by Family Context.

## Birth Spacing by Mother's Age at Prior Birth

- The median spacing between first and second births was lowest for mothers aged 30-34 (29 months) at their first birth and highest for mothers who had their first birth as a teenager (38 months).
- For third births, the number of months since last birth was lowest for mothers aged 35 or older (31 months) at their second birth and highest for mothers aged 20-24 (28 months) at their second birth.

Figure 1. Median Spacing for Second Birth by Age at Prior Birth

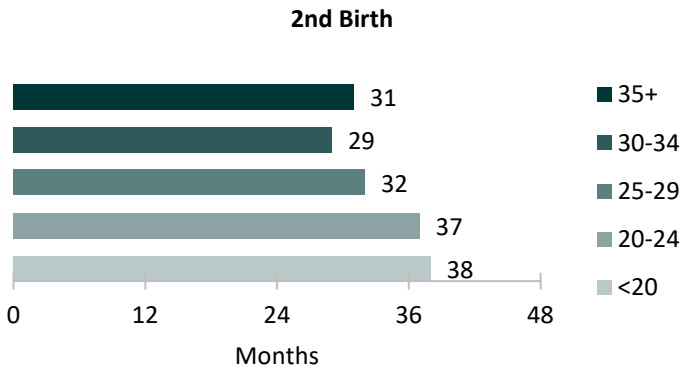
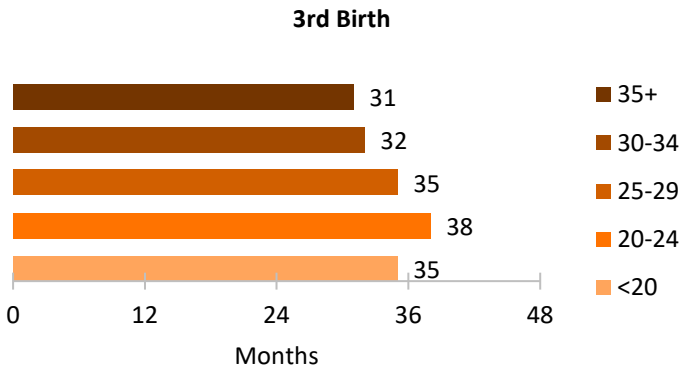


Figure 2. Median Spacing for Third Birth by Age at Prior Birth



Source: NCFMR analyses of National Survey of Family Growth, 2011-2013 & 2013-2015

## Birth Spacing by Race and Ethnicity

- For second births, White women had the shortest median spacing, at 34 months.
  - Black and Hispanic women had birth spacing two and three months longer, respectively.
- The median spacing for third births was fairly similar for White and Black women, at just under three years.
  - Hispanic women had their third births nearly three-and-a-half years after their second birth.

Figure 3. Median Spacing for Second Birth by Race and Ethnicity

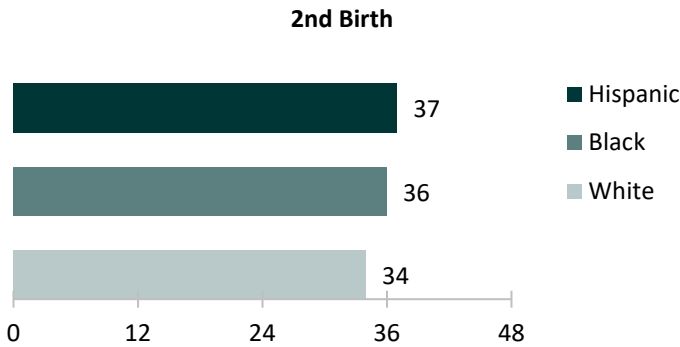
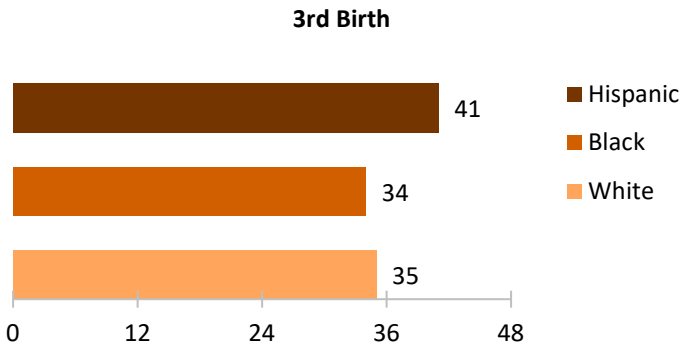


Figure 4. Median Spacing for Third Birth by Race and Ethnicity



Source: NCFMR analyses of National Survey of Family Growth, 2011-2013 & 2013-2015

## Birth Spacing by Completed Maternal Education

- The median spacing between first and second births was progressively longer moving from those with less than high school (34 months), to those with some college (39 months).
  - However, mothers with at least a Bachelor's degree had the shortest spacing, at 32 months.
- Among those with third births, the association was reversed—the median number of months between births declined with increasing levels of education.
  - College-educated mothers still had the shortest spacing, at 35 months.

Figure 5. Median Spacing for Second Birth by Completed Education

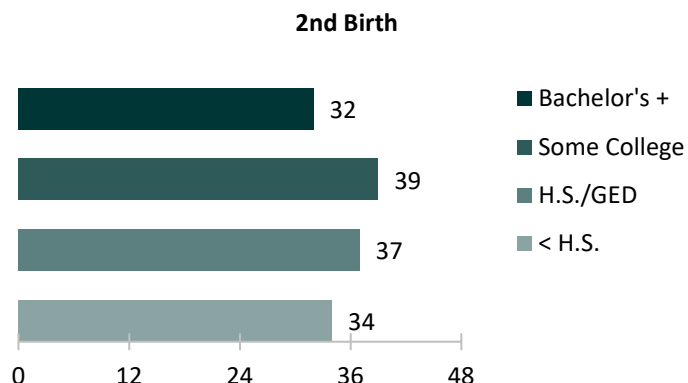
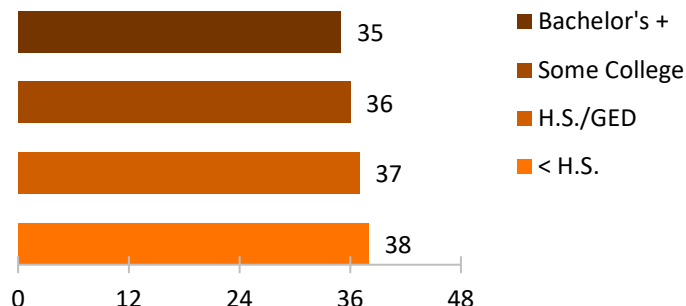


Figure 6. Median Spacing for Third Birth by Completed Education



Source: NCFMR analyses of National Survey of Family Growth, 2011-2013 & 2013-2015

Mothers with at least a  
Bachelor's degree...had the shortest spacing.

### Data Sources:

National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). (2016). 1988, 1995, 2002, 2006-2010, 2011-2013, 2013-2015 National Survey of Family Growth Public Use Data and Documentation. Hyattsville, MD: CDC National Center for Health Statistics. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nsfg/index.htm>

### References:

Conde-Agudelo, A., Rosas-Bermudez, A., Castano, F., & Norton, M. H. (2012). Effects of birth spacing on maternal, perinatal, infant, and child health: a systematic review of causal mechanisms. *Studies in Family Planning*, 43(2), 93-114.

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