

Spina bifida is characterized by incomplete closure of certain bones of the spinal column (vertebrae), leaving a portion of the spinal cord exposed. Part of the contents of the spinal canal may protrude through this opening. In the most severe form, rachischisis, the opening is extensive. Spina bifida may cause difficulties with bladder control, walking and/or other functions, depending on the severity of associated symptoms. Spina bifida is the most common neural tube defect in the United States. Between 1,500 and 2,000 babies out of about 4 million births are born with this disorder each year in the United States. Spina bifida is usually an isolated birth defect but it can also occur as part of a syndrome with other birth defects. It is one of a group of disorders known as neural tube defects.