

INFANT MORTALITY

Infant mortality is a key health outcome for people in their early years of life. Numerous studies have examined the effect of a variety of medical and non-medical determinants of infant mortality. These include the economic and social conditions of mothers and newborns, the social environment, individual lifestyles and attitudes as well as the characteristics of health systems. Some countries combine low levels of infant mortality with low levels of health expenditures, suggesting that higher spending is not necessarily a precondition to improve outcomes in this area.

Definition

The infant mortality rate is the number of deaths of children under one year of age, expressed per 1 000 live births. Neonatal mortality refers to the death of children during the first four weeks of life. Post neonatal mortality refers to deaths occurring between the second and the twelfth months of life.

Comparability

Some of the international variation in infant and neonatal mortality rates may be due to variations among countries in

registering practices for premature infants. Most countries have no gestational age or weight limits for mortality registration. Limits exist for Norway (where the gestational age required to be counted as a death following a live birth must exceed 12 weeks) and in the Czech Republic, France, the Netherlands and Poland (which apply a minimum gestational age of 22 weeks and/or a weight threshold of 500 g).

Overview

All OECD countries have achieved remarkable progress in reducing infant mortality rates. In 1970, the average infant mortality rate for OECD countries approached 30 deaths per 1 000 live births; by 2007, this rate stood at 4.9 deaths per 1 000 live births, implying a reduction of over 80%. Portugal has reduced its infant mortality rate by over 90% since 1970, i.e. from the European country with the highest infant mortality rate in 1970 to one of the OECD countries with the lowest rate in 2007. The infant mortality rate recorded large reductions in Korea and smaller ones in the United States.

Around two-thirds of the deaths that occur during the first year of life are neonatal deaths, i.e. deaths that occur during the first four weeks of life; congenital malformations, prematurity and other conditions arising during pregnancy are the principal factors contributing to neonatal mortality in developed countries. For post neonatal mortality, i.e. deaths that occur beyond the first month of life, a greater range of causes comes into play – the most common being SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome), birth defects, infections and accidents.

With the increasing number of women deferring childbearing and the rise in multiple births linked with fertility treatments, the number of pre-term births has tended to increase. In several OECD countries, this has contributed to a leveling-off of the downward trend in infant mortality rates over the past few years.

Sources

- OECD (2009), *OECD Health Data 2009*, OECD, Paris.

Further information

Analytical publications

- OECD (2004), *The OECD Health Project: Towards High-Performing Health Systems*, OECD, Paris.
- OECD (2004), *The OECD Health Project: Towards High-Performing Health Systems – Policy Studies*, OECD, Paris.
- OECD (2008), *OECD Health Policy Studies: The Looming Crisis in the Health Workforce: How Can OECD Countries Respond?*, OECD, Paris.

Statistical publications

- OECD (2006), *Economic Valuation of Environmental Health Risks to Children*, OECD, Paris.
- OECD (2009), *Health at a Glance 2009: OECD Indicators*, OECD, Paris.

Online databases

- OECD Health Data.

Web sites

- OECD Health Data, www.oecd.org/health/healthdata.

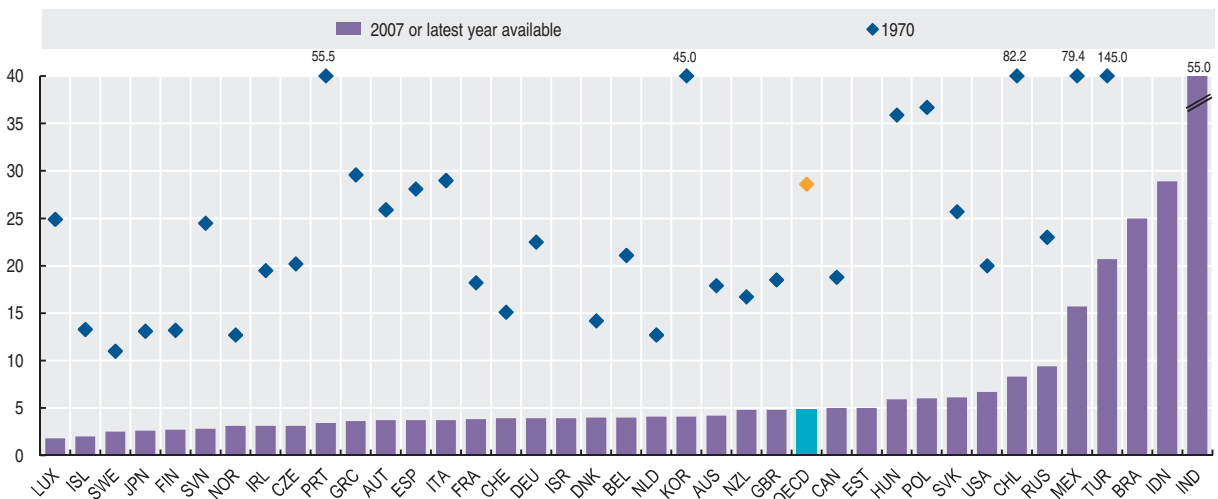


Infant mortality
Deaths per 1 000 live births

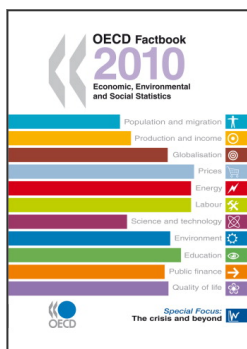
	1970	1980	1990	1995	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Australia	17.9	10.7	8.2	5.7	5.2	5.3	5.0	4.8	4.7	5.0	4.7	4.2
Austria	25.9	14.3	7.8	5.4	4.8	4.8	4.1	4.5	4.5	4.2	3.6	3.7
Belgium	21.1	12.1	8.0	6.0	4.8	4.5	4.4	4.1	3.8	3.7	4.0	4.0
Canada	18.8	10.4	6.8	6.1	5.3	5.2	5.4	5.3	5.3	5.4	5.0	..
Czech Republic	20.2	16.9	10.8	7.7	4.1	4.0	4.1	3.9	3.7	3.4	3.3	3.1
Denmark	14.2	8.4	7.5	5.1	5.3	4.9	4.4	4.4	4.4	4.4	3.8	4.0
Finland	13.2	7.6	5.6	3.9	3.8	3.2	3.0	3.1	3.3	3.0	2.8	2.7
France	18.2	10.0	7.3	5.0	4.5	4.6	4.2	4.2	4.0	3.8	3.8	..
Germany	22.5	12.4	7.0	5.3	4.4	4.3	4.2	4.2	4.1	3.9	3.8	3.9
Greece	29.6	17.9	9.7	8.1	5.4	5.1	5.1	4.0	4.1	3.8	3.7	3.6
Hungary	35.9	23.2	14.8	10.7	9.2	8.1	7.2	7.3	6.6	6.2	5.7	5.9
Iceland	13.3	7.8	5.8	6.0	3.0	2.7	2.3	2.4	2.8	2.3	1.4	2.0
Ireland	19.5	11.1	8.2	6.4	6.2	5.7	5.0	5.3	4.6	4.0	3.7	3.1
Italy	29.0	14.6	8.2	6.2	4.5	4.6	4.3	3.9	3.9	3.8	3.7	3.7
Japan	13.1	7.5	4.6	4.3	3.2	3.1	3.0	3.0	2.8	2.8	2.6	2.6
Korea	45.0	..	..	..	..	..	5.3	..	..	4.7	4.1	..
Luxembourg	24.9	11.5	7.3	5.5	5.1	5.9	5.1	4.9	3.9	2.6	2.5	1.8
Mexico	79.4	51.0	39.2	27.7	19.4	18.3	18.1	17.3	17.6	16.8	16.2	15.7
Netherlands	12.7	8.6	7.1	5.5	5.1	5.4	5.0	4.8	4.4	4.9	4.4	4.1
New Zealand	16.7	13.0	8.4	6.7	6.3	5.6	6.2	5.4	5.9	5.0	5.2	4.8
Norway	12.7	8.1	6.9	4.0	3.8	3.9	3.5	3.4	3.2	3.1	3.2	3.1
Poland	36.7	25.5	19.3	13.6	8.1	7.7	7.5	7.0	6.8	6.4	6.0	6.0
Portugal	55.5	24.2	11.0	7.5	5.5	5.0	5.0	4.1	3.8	3.5	3.3	3.4
Slovak Republic	25.7	20.9	12.0	11.0	8.6	6.2	7.6	7.9	6.8	7.2	6.6	6.1
Spain	28.1	12.3	7.6	5.5	4.4	4.1	4.1	3.9	4.0	3.8	3.8	3.7
Sweden	11.0	6.9	6.0	4.1	3.4	3.7	3.3	3.1	3.1	2.4	2.8	2.5
Switzerland	15.1	9.1	6.8	5.0	4.9	5.0	5.0	4.3	4.2	4.2	4.4	3.9
Turkey	145.0	117.5	55.4	43.0	28.9	27.8	26.7	28.7	24.6	23.6	22.3	20.7
United Kingdom	18.5	12.1	7.9	6.2	5.6	5.5	5.2	5.2	5.1	5.1	5.0	4.8
United States	20.0	12.6	9.2	7.6	6.9	6.9	7.0	6.8	6.8	6.9	6.7	..
OECD average	28.1	17.9	11.2	8.4	6.5	6.2	6.0	5.9	5.6	5.4	5.1	4.9
Brazil	..	69.1	47.0	37.9	30.1	29.2	28.4	27.5	26.6	25.8	25.0	..
Chile	82.2	31.1	15.9	11.3	9.3	8.7	8.1	8.2	8.7	8.2	7.9	8.3
China	..	..	32.9	..	28.4	..	..	..	..	24.3	..	..
Estonia	..	17.1	12.3	14.9	8.4	8.8	5.7	7.0	6.4	5.4	4.4	5.0
India	..	..	..	74.0	68.0	66.0	63.0	60.0	58.0	58.0	57.0	55.0
Indonesia	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	28.9	..	..
Israel	..	15.6	9.9	6.8	5.5	5.1	5.4	4.9	4.6	4.4	4.0	3.9
Russian Federation	23.0	22.1	17.4	18.1	15.3	14.6	13.3	12.4	11.6	11.0	10.2	9.4
Slovenia	24.5	15.3	8.4	5.5	4.9	4.2	3.8	4.0	3.7	4.1	3.4	2.8

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Deaths per 1 000 live births



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