

Infant mortality

Infant mortality is an important indicator for monitoring the health status of children as most childhood deaths occur in the first year of life. It is defined as the number of liveborn babies dying in the first year of life over the population of liveborn babies in the same year (ABS 2003).

Data presented here are for registered deaths of liveborn babies dying within the first year of life. The data are presented by year of death from 1997 to 2001. Table 7 details the ten leading causes of the 6,564 reported infant deaths over this period. The ten leading causes of death accounted for only 35.6% of all infant deaths, showing the variability in causes of infant deaths.

During the period 1997–2001, the leading cause of death for infants was *sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)* (ICD-10 code R95) (10.0%), followed by *fetus and newborn affected by other forms of placental separation and haemorrhage* (ICD-10 code P021) (4.6%) and *fetus and newborn affected by multiple pregnancy* (twin and higher order multiple births) (ICD-10 code P015) (4.1%) (Table 7). Of the 6,564 infant deaths reported during the period, 670 (10.2%) were deaths of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander infants. Extremely low birthweight accounted for 3.1% of all deaths in Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander infants.

The leading cause of death in 2001 was *fetus and newborn affected by multiple pregnancy*. The proportion of deaths in this category has increased from 2.6% in 1997 to 9.1% in 2001.

Table 7: Top ten leading causes of infant mortality, 1997–2001

ICD-10 code	Cause of death	Number of deaths	Per cent
R95	Sudden infant death syndrome	658	10.0
P021	Fetus and newborn affected by other forms of placental separation and haemorrhage	304	4.6
P015	Fetus and newborn affected by multiple pregnancy	269	4.1
P011	Fetus and newborn affected by premature rupture of membranes	248	3.8
P027	Fetus and newborn affected by chorioamnionitis	187	2.9
P010	Fetus and newborn affected by incompetent cervix	165	2.5
P220	Respiratory distress syndrome of newborn	142	2.2
Q249	Congenital malformation of the heart, unspecified	127	1.9
Q336	Hypoplasia and dysplasia of lung	127	1.9
P219	Birth asphyxia, unspecified	108	1.7

Australia's babies: their health and wellbeing

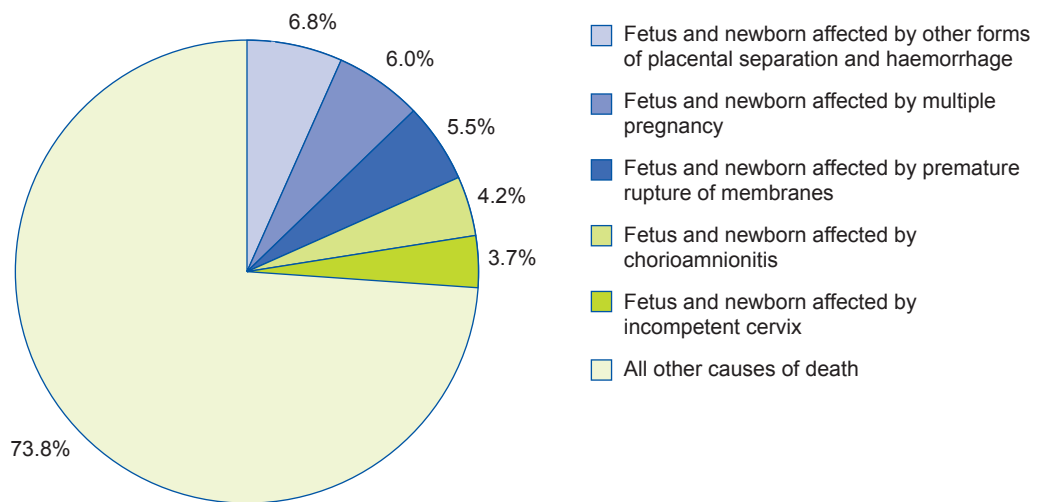
Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)

There was a decrease in the proportion of infant deaths from SIDS over the 5-year period, from 11.4% in 1997, to 7.5% in 2001. In 2001, SIDS was no longer the overall leading cause of death for infants. However, SIDS remained the leading cause of postneonatal deaths (infants aged 28 days to 1 year).

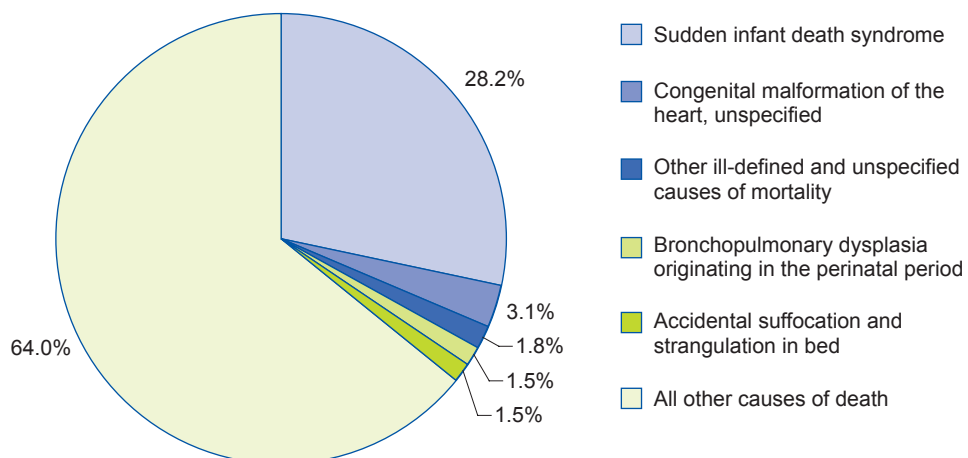
Over the period 1997–2001, the leading cause of postneonatal deaths was SIDS, accounting for 28.2% of all deaths (Figure 2). This was followed by *congenital malformations of the heart, unspecified* (ICD-10 code Q249) (3.1%). For neonatal deaths (babies less than 28 days old), the leading cause of death was *fetus and newborn affected*

Figure 2: Leading causes of neonatal and postneonatal deaths, 1997–2001

Neonatal deaths



Postneonatal deaths



by other forms of placental separation and haemorrhage (6.8%), followed by fetus and newborn affected by multiple pregnancy (6.0%) and fetus and newborn affected by premature rupture of membranes (ICD-10 code P011) (5.5%).

The leading cause of death for both Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and other infants was SIDS; however, a higher proportion of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander infants died from SIDS (16.6%) compared with other infants (9.3%).

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