

**Indigenous mothers  
and their babies,  
Australia 2001–2004**

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The AIHW National Perinatal Statistics Unit (NPSU) is a collaborating unit of the AIHW, established in 1979. The NPSU aims at improving the health of Australian mothers and babies through the collection, analysis and reporting of information on reproductive, perinatal and maternal health. It maintains national collections on perinatal health, maternal deaths, congenital anomalies and assisted reproduction technology. The NPSU is located at the Sydney Children's Hospital and is part of the School of Women's and Children's Health, Faculty of Medicine, University of New South Wales.

The AIHW and NPSU recognise the unique position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and acknowledge the land that we work on as belonging to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We acknowledge that the work we do includes every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person of this nation. We pay our respects to elders of past and present Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Please note that as with all statistical reports there is the potential for minor revisions of data in *Indigenous mothers and their babies, Australia 2001–2004*. Please refer to the online version at <[www.npsu.unsw.edu.au](http://www.npsu.unsw.edu.au)>.

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# **Indigenous mothers and their babies, Australia 2001–2004**

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# Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AHLO	Aboriginal Hospital Liaison Officer
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
ASGC	Australian Standard Geographical Classification
g	gram
HDSC	Health Data Standards Committee
NHDD	National Health Data Dictionary
NMDS	National Minimum Data Set
NPDC	National Perinatal Data Collection
NPSU	AIHW National Perinatal Statistics Unit
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
Qld	Queensland
SA	South Australia
SEIFA	Socioeconomic Indexes for Areas
Tas	Tasmania
VAED	Victorian Admitted Episodes Dataset
Vic	Victoria
WA	Western Australia
WHO	World Health Organization
n.a.	Not available
n.p.	Not published
..	Not applicable

# Key findings

This is the third report published by the AIHW on Indigenous mothers and their babies in Australia. Data from the National Perinatal Data Collection are used to form the most recent picture of health and other outcomes for Indigenous mothers and their babies in Australia.

Between 2001 and 2004, 35,264 women who identified as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin gave birth to 35,682 babies – 3.6% of all babies born to all women during this period.

## Indigenous mothers

In 2001–2004, compared with non-Indigenous mothers, Indigenous mothers:

- were younger – mean age of 24.8 years compared with 29.7 years
- were less likely to be first-time mothers – 30% compared with 42%
- were much less likely to give birth in private hospitals – 3% compared with 32%
- had a higher proportion of spontaneous onset of labour – 70% compared with 57%
- had a lower proportion of induced labours – 17% compared with 26%
- were less likely to have a caesarean section – 22% compared with 28%
- were three times as likely to have smoked during pregnancy – 51% compared with 17%.

## Babies born to Indigenous mothers

In 2001–2004, compared with babies born to non-Indigenous mothers, babies born to Indigenous mothers:

- were almost twice as likely to be born preterm – 14% compared with 8%
- were twice as likely to be of low birthweight – 13% compared with 6% of live births
- had a shorter median length of stay in hospital – 3 days compared with 4 days
- had almost twice the fetal death rate – 12 compared with 7 per 1,000 births
- had twice the neonatal death rate – 6 compared with 3 per 1,000 live births.

## What is changing over time for Indigenous mothers and their babies?

Over the period 1991–2004:

- There was a decrease in Indigenous teenage mothers from 10 to 8 per 100 women and an increase in the proportion of Indigenous mothers aged 35 years and over – from 1.4 to 2.3 per 100 women.
- The caesarean section rate increased from 20% to 26% among Indigenous women compared with an increase from 19% to 29% among non-Indigenous mothers.
- The proportion of low birthweight babies increased significantly for babies born to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous mothers. This increase was greater among babies born to Indigenous mothers – from 11% to 12% compared with from 2.5% to 2.6% for non-Indigenous mothers.

- The fetal death rate of babies born to Indigenous mothers declined significantly from 16 to 11 per 1,000 births, and remained stable among babies born to non-Indigenous mothers at around 6 per 1,000 births.

### **Indigenous status data quality**

Results of the assessment of the quality of Indigenous status in perinatal data in each state and territory over the period 1991–2004 showed that:

- data from New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory are suitable for trends analysis from 1991 onwards
- data from the Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania are not considered stable enough to be included in trends analyses mainly because of small population size and some issues with data quality over the reporting period.