

Infant mortality

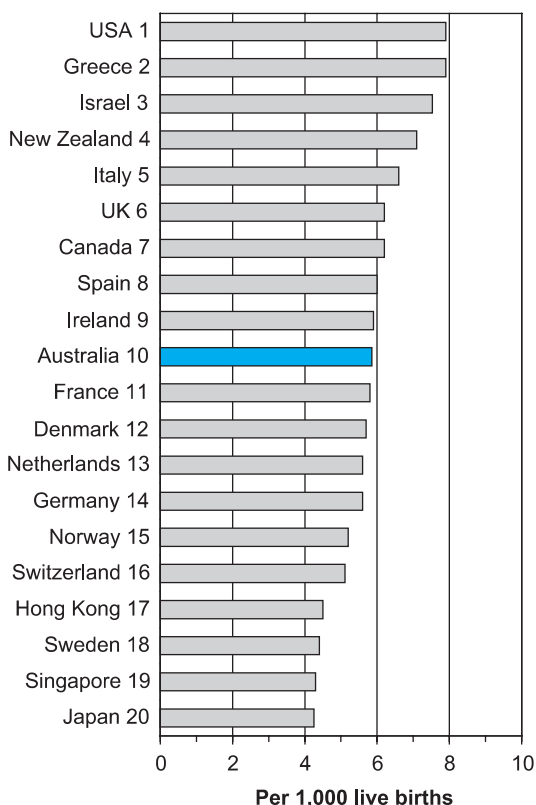


Figure 1: Infant mortality rates, 1994

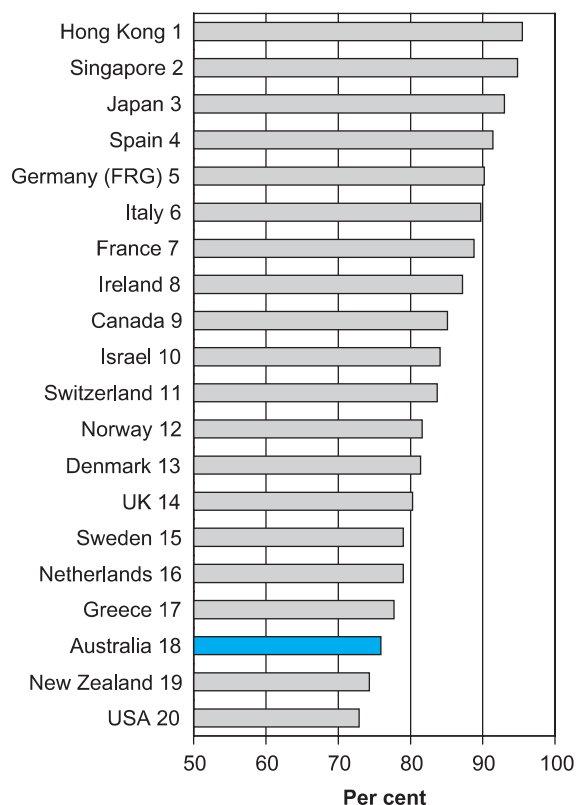


Figure 2: Declines in infant mortality rates, 1950 to 1994

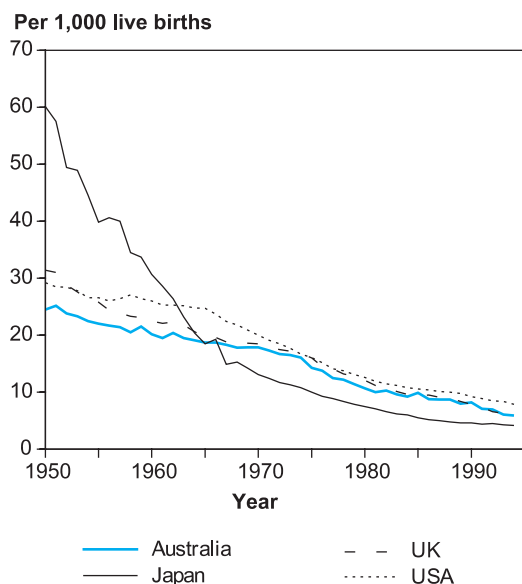


Figure 3: Trends in infant mortality, 1950 to 1994

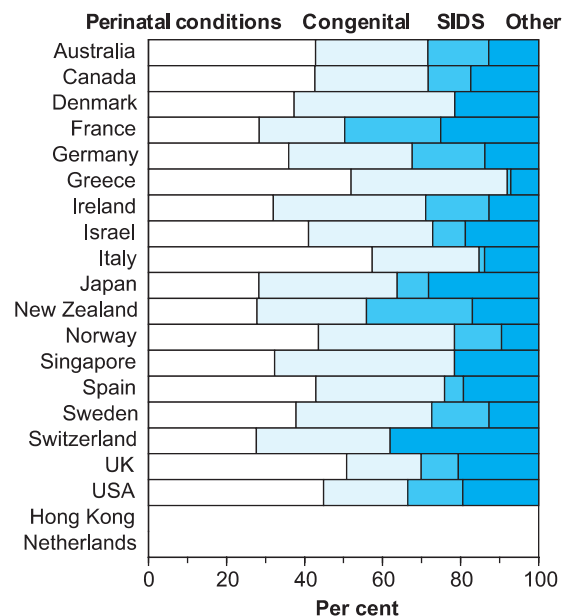


Figure 4: Infant mortality, by cause of death, 1992-1993

Infant mortality

Infant, neonatal and post-neonatal mortality rates (per 1,000 live births)

Country	Infant mortality rate					Year	Neonatal (<28 days)	Post-neonatal (28–364 days)
	1950	1960	1970	1980	1994			
Australia	24.5	20.2	17.9	10.7	5.9	1994	3.91	1.95
Canada	41.5	27.3	18.8	10.4	6.2	1993	4.15	2.15
Denmark	30.7	21.5	14.2	8.4	5.7	1993	3.57	1.83
France	52.0	27.4	18.2	10.0	5.8	1993	3.15	3.32
Germany (FRG)	57.2	33.8	23.6	12.6	5.6	1994	3.22	2.38
Greece	35.4	40.1	29.6	17.9	7.9	1994	5.60	2.33
Hong Kong	99.6	41.5	19.2	11.2	4.5	1994	2.68	1.81
Ireland	46.2	29.3	19.5	11.1	5.9	1994	3.96	1.96
Israel	47.3	31.0	25.3	15.6	7.5	1993	4.71	3.09
Italy	63.8	43.9	29.6	14.6	6.6	1992	5.85	2.06
Japan	60.1	30.4	13.1	7.5	4.2	1994	2.33	1.92
Netherlands	26.7	17.9	12.7	8.6	5.6	1994	4.02	1.63
New Zealand	27.6	22.6	16.7	12.9	7.1	1993	3.81	3.52
Norway	28.2	18.9	12.7	8.1	5.2	1993	3.45	1.66
Singapore	82.2	34.8	19.7	11.7	4.3	1994	2.40	1.85
Spain	69.8	43.7	26.5	11.1	6.0	1992	4.61	2.44
Sweden	21.0	16.6	11.0	6.9	4.4	1994	1.89	2.56
Switzerland	31.2	21.1	15.1	9.1	5.1	1994	3.27	1.84
UK	31.4	22.5	18.4	12.1	6.2	1994	4.12	2.07
USA	29.2	26.0	20.0	12.6	7.9	1993	5.29	3.07

Sources: United Nations 1979, 1997; WHO 1995a, 1996d.

- Infant mortality, measured as the number of deaths below one year of age, is used internationally as a key indicator of a country's social and economic development. In developed countries, however, infant mortality is not strongly correlated with well-known socioeconomic measures such as the amount spent on health or per capita GDP. However, it may be used to provide information on the health status of mothers and infants and the delivery of health services.
- In 1994, the infant death rate for Australia was 5.9 deaths per 1,000 live births, a ranking of equal ninth among 20 developed countries. Countries with comparatively high infant mortality include the United States and Greece; countries with comparatively low rates include Singapore, Japan and Sweden (Figure 1).
- Understanding international differences in infant death rates is difficult, as it involves factors such as differing population characteristics, maternal risk behaviours and data collection systems. For example, significant inter-population variation in infant mortality rates is noted in the United States. In Japan, cultural customs favour recording infant deaths as stillbirths, since these are not recorded in the family registration system (US Congress, Office of Technology Assessment, 1993).
- Infant mortality in all the countries included here for comparison has more than halved since 1950 (Figures 2 and 3). Although recording a fall of over 75%, Australia's achievement is bettered by many other developed countries. However, Australia's baseline rate in 1950 was low compared to other countries.
- Infant mortality can be divided into two components: neonatal (covering the first four weeks of life) and post-neonatal (covering the remaining period to the end of the first year of life). Greece and Italy have higher neonatal rates (and deaths due to perinatal conditions), New Zealand and France higher post-neonatal rates (and deaths due to SIDS). Post-neonatal death rates are higher than neonatal death rates in France and Sweden. Cause-of-death reporting, however, can vary markedly between countries and may affect the comparative picture (Figure 4).

For more information, see:

Wegman ME 1996. Infant mortality: some international comparisons. *Pediatrics* 98: 1020–7.