CHILD DEATH REGISTER
KEY FINDINGS 2018–19
Child deaths in Queensland

The Queensland Child Death Register recorded the deaths of 386 children and young people in 2018–19, representing a rate of 33.9 deaths per 100,000 Queensland children aged 0–17 years.

The infant mortality rate was 3.6 deaths per 1000 live births, down from 3.9 deaths per 1000 in 2017–18.

Child deaths in 2018–19

- Deaths from diseases and morbid conditions (natural causes) accounted for the majority of deaths of children (261 deaths—or 68%).
- External (non-natural) causes of death accounted for 90 deaths (23%). A further 35 deaths (9%) were pending a cause of death at the time of reporting.
- Suicide was the leading external causes of death with 37 deaths. This is the highest annual number reported since the Child Death Register began in 2004 and represents a marked increase from previous years with between 15 and 26 per year.
- Transport incidents were the second leading external cause of death, with 22 deaths. Twelve of these were in motor vehicle crashes and seven were pedestrian incidents.
- Sixteen children and young people drowned. Five 1–4 year olds drowned in private swimming pools. Five children who drowned were international visitors (either as exchange students or on family holidays).
- Seven children died as a result of suspected or confirmed assault and neglect.
- Twenty-seven infant deaths (<1 year) were classified as sudden unexpected death in infancy (SUDI). The category is not a cause of death (which will be counted within the relevant cause).

Vulnerable groups

Young children are at a higher risk of drowning and other accidental injuries. Six 1–4 year olds and two infants died in drowning incidents. Three 1–4 year olds died from other non-intentional injury1 and two died in low speed vehicle runovers.

Sixty-one Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children died in 2018–19. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child mortality rate continues to be twice the rate for non-Indigenous children as decreases in Indigenous mortality have been matched by decreases in non-Indigenous mortality.

There were 58 deaths of children known to the child protection system in 2018–19. Twenty-three of the 58 children died as a result of diseases and morbid conditions, 14 deaths were from suicide, six deaths were from fatal assault and neglect, five deaths were from drowning, and two deaths each were transport-related and other non-intentional injury. The cause of death was pending for 6 deaths.

Trends from 2004 to 2019

There has been a gradual decline in child mortality rates, from a high of around 50 per 100,000 dropping to below 40 per 100,000 in the last 5 years. The overall trend is driven by decreases in child mortality from explained diseases and morbid conditions, the two largest contributors of which are deaths from perinatal conditions2 and congenital anomalies.

The child mortality rate from unexplained diseases and morbid conditions (i.e. from natural causes but cause has not been identified) has shown some recent decreases, but there is no strong overall trend. Almost all of this group are infant deaths classified as either Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) or undetermined causes.

Trends in external causes of death

Child mortality rates from external (or non-natural) causes have generally decreased over the period. This group includes deaths from injuries, either non-intentional (accidental) injuries such as transport incidents or drowning, or from intentional injuries, which includes suicide and fatal assault and neglect.

Transport-related child mortality rates declined, dropping by 61% over 15 years (or 4.1% per year).

While there were changes over time in the number and rate of deaths from drowning, other non-intentional injury, suicide and fatal assault, the changes were not indicative of trends (changes not statistically significant).

Comparison with other jurisdictions

The QFCC compilation of Australian states and territories and New Zealand child death statistics 2017 indicates Queensland had the third-highest child mortality rate in 2017, after the Northern Territory and New Zealand. Further Queensland had the highest number of drowning deaths of any jurisdiction in the period.

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1 Includes a range of injuries such as suffocation, struck by object, falls and poisoning.

2 Diseases and conditions which originate during pregnancy or the neonatal period (first 28 days of life).
Leading cause of death

Table 1: Leading causes of death by age, 2016–17 to 2018–19 (annual average)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th># Leading cause</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 1 year</td>
<td>Perinatal conditions</td>
<td>217.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 1 year</td>
<td>Congenital anomalies</td>
<td>96.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 1 year</td>
<td>SIDS and undetermined causes</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–4 years</td>
<td>Drowning</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–4 years</td>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–4 years</td>
<td>Congenital anomalies</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–9 years</td>
<td>Neoplasms</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–9 years</td>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–9 years</td>
<td>Drowning</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10–14 years</td>
<td>Neoplasms</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10–14 years</td>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10–14 years</td>
<td>Other non-intentional injury</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15–17 years</td>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15–17 years</td>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15–17 years</td>
<td>Neoplasms</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Queensland Child Death Register (2016–19)

SIDS Sudden Infant Death Syndrome

1. Rates have been calculated for age categories per 100,000 children in Queensland using the Estimated Resident Population data as at June 2016. Rates are averaged over the three year period.

The leading causes of death based on the last three years:

- For infants under 1 year—diseases and conditions that originate during pregnancy or the neonatal period (first 28 days of life) followed by congenital anomalies. SIDS and undetermined causes$^3$ was the third leading cause of death in infants.
- For 1–4 year olds—drowning was the leading cause of death followed by transport related deaths and deaths from congenital anomalies in equal second. Deaths from neoplasms (cancers) was third leading cause of death in children in this age group.
- For 5–9 year olds—neoplasms (cancers) followed by transport and deaths from drowning.
- For 10–14 year olds—neoplasms followed by suicide. Other non-intentional injury was the third leading cause of death in this age group.
- For 15–17 year olds—suicide followed by transport and neoplasms.

More information


Sources

The Queensland Child Death Register contains information sourced from: Queensland Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages; the Office of the State Coroner; the Queensland Police Service; Queensland Health; the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women; the National Coronial Information System; and the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

More detailed references, definitions and methodology can be found in the QFCC’s reports on child deaths referenced above.

Data for prevention activities

The QFCC works with researchers and government agencies to raise community awareness and develop prevention programs and policies, by identifying risk factors, trends and emerging safety hazards.

The QFCC can provide detailed child death data to researchers and organisations at no cost. Contact [child_death_prevention@qfcc.qld.gov.au](mailto:child_death_prevention@qfcc.qld.gov.au)

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$^3$ SIDS are sudden unexpected infant deaths, apparently occurring during sleep, where the cause remains unexplained after thorough investigation. For undetermined causes, the cause of death is unexplained but the death does not meet the criteria for SIDS.