Over the last three financial years the Queensland Child Death Register recorded the deaths of 164 children known to the child protection system in the 12-month period prior to their death. This included child deaths from natural causes (diseases and morbid conditions) and from external (non-natural) causes.

Over the three years, the average annual rate of deaths was 64.6 deaths per 100,000 children known to child protection each year. In comparison, the Queensland average for all children was 34.9 deaths per 100,000 children aged 0–17 years.

In 2018–19, 58 of the total 386 child deaths were of children known to the child protection system. Of these:

- 23 were from natural causes
- 14 were suicide
- 6 were suspected/confirmed fatal assault and neglect
- 5 drowned
- 2 were transport-related
- 2 were other non-intentional injury
- 6 were pending a cause.

### Causes of death

The mortality rate for children known to the child protection system has been consistently higher than for all children, especially for deaths from external (non-natural) causes. This is explained, to an extent, by the significant disadvantage, abuse and neglect these children experience prior to coming to the attention of the child protection system, as well as the often multiple risk factors present in their families.

As indicated in Table 1, children known to the child protection system were over-represented for each of the external causes of death.

The 3-year average mortality rate for children known to the child protection system was three or more times higher than the Queensland child mortality rate for:

- drowning
- fatal assault and neglect
- suicide
- other non-intentional injury
- sudden unexpected death in infancy.

Sudden unexpected death in infancy (SUDI) is a category where an infant (aged under one year) dies suddenly, usually during sleep, with no immediately obvious cause. Risk factors include unsafe sleep environment, shared sleeping, stomach sleep position and smoking in the household.

### Background

The Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women (DCSYW) administers the child protection system in Queensland. A child is deemed to be known to the child protection system if, within one year before the child’s death:

- the child was in the custody or guardianship of the DCSYW, or
- DCSYW was aware of alleged harm or alleged risk of harm, or
- DCSYW took action under the Child Protection Act 1999 in relation to the child, or
- DCSYW was notified of concerns before the child’s birth and reasonably suspected the child might be in need of protection after their birth.

Deaths of children known to the child protection system in the 12 months prior to death are subject to a review of the services provided to the child.
Table 1: Child mortality rate by cause of death, three years to June 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause of death</th>
<th>Known to child protection in last 12 months</th>
<th>All child deaths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rate</td>
<td>Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All causes</td>
<td>64.6</td>
<td>34.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diseases and morbid conditions</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External causes</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drowning</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other non-intentional injury</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatal assault and neglect</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sudden unexpected death in infancy (SUDI)</strong></td>
<td><strong>196.2</strong></td>
<td><strong>48.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Source: Queensland Child Death Register 2016–19
1. Rates are per 100,000 population aged 0–17 and are averaged over the three-year period 2016–17 to 2018–19.
2. The denominator used for mortality rates for deaths of children known to the child protection system is the number of children known to the DCSYW in the previous financial year.
3. The denominator used for the all child deaths mortality rates is the Estimated Resident Population (ERP) of children aged 0–17 years at June 2016.
4. SUDI is a category of deaths where an infant (<1 year) dies suddenly with no immediately obvious cause. SUDI deaths will also be classified under the official cause of death when it becomes available.
5. Rates for SUDI are calculated per 100,000 children aged under 1 year in each category.

Data for prevention activities


More detailed references, definitions and methodology can be found in the latest annual report on child deaths.

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)