

# CHILD DEATH REGISTER

## KEY FINDINGS 2020–21

### Child deaths in Queensland

Queensland  
Family & Child  
Commission

In the 12-month period from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021, the deaths of 398 children and young people aged 0–17 years were registered in Queensland.<sup>i</sup> The child mortality rate was 32.9 deaths per 100,000 children aged 0–17 years and the infant mortality rate was 3.8 deaths per 1000 births (rates are averaged over the last 3 years).

#### Child deaths in 2020–21

- Deaths from natural causes (diseases and morbid conditions) accounted for the majority of deaths of children (266 deaths—or 67%) (Table 1).
- External (non-natural) causes of death accounted for 86 deaths (22%).
- Transport was the leading external cause of death, with 31 deaths, the highest annual number in the last 7 years. Nineteen of these were in motor vehicle crashes and five were motorcycle incidents.
- Suicide was the second leading external cause of death with 30 deaths. It was the second highest number after 37 in 2018–19 since the Register started in 2004.
- 17 deaths were from unexplained causes. This includes deaths categorised as Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and undetermined causes.
- 12 children died from other non-intentional injuries.<sup>ii</sup>
- 10 children and young people drowned.
- 3 children died as a result of suspected or confirmed assault and neglect.
- 29 deaths were pending a cause of death at the time of reporting.

#### Vulnerable groups

**Young children** are at a higher risk of drowning and other accidental injuries. Five 1–4 year olds died in drowning incidents. Four 1–4 year olds died from other non-intentional injury<sup>iii</sup> and three died in low-speed vehicle runovers.

Sudden unexpected infant deaths represent a significant group of deaths from non-natural causes for **infants**. Adopting safe sleep practices from birth offers the best protections to reduce the risk of SIDS and sleep accidents.

Some children are more vulnerable to experiencing adversity—including experiences that increase risk of death—than others. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and those children who are known to the child protection system (Child Safety) often experience multiple vulnerabilities and are consistently and significantly over-represented in child mortality statistics.

Seventy-one **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children** died in 2020–21. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child mortality rate was twice the rate for non-Indigenous children.

Fifty-three children **known to the child protection system** died in 2020–21.

**Table 1: Child deaths in Queensland, 2020–21<sup>a</sup>**

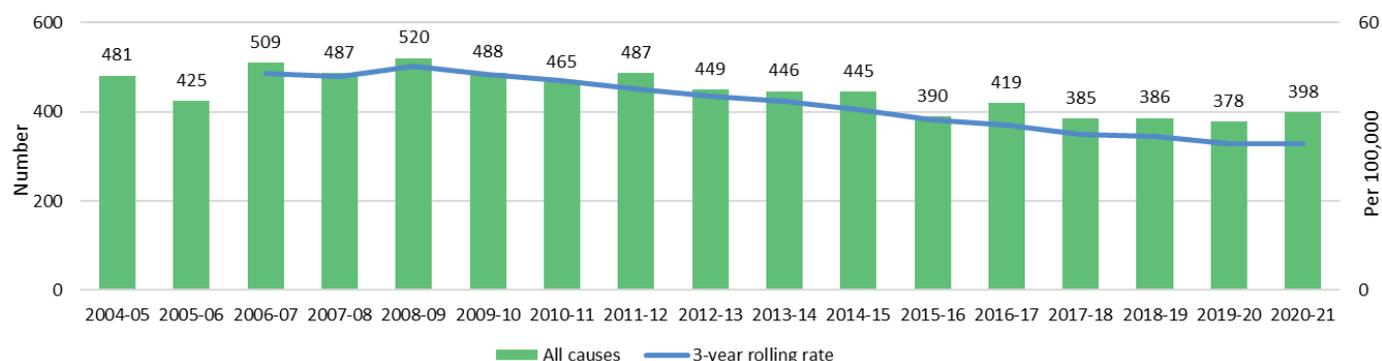
	Number	%
<b>All deaths</b>		
Deaths of children 0–17 years	398	100%
<b>Cause of death</b>		
<b>Natural causes</b>	<b>266</b>	<b>67%</b>
<b>External causes</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>22%</b>
Transport	31	8%
Suicide	30	8%
Other non-intentional injury-related death	12	3%
Drowning	10	3%
Fatal assault and neglect	3	1%
<b>Unexplained causes</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>4%</b>
SIDS and undetermined causes	17	4%
<b>Cause of death pending</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>Sudden Unexpected Deaths in Infancy (SUDI)</b>		
Sudden unexpected infant deaths	34	9%
<b>Sex<sup>b</sup></b>		
Female	185	46%
Male	213	54%
<b>Age category</b>		
Under 1 year	239	60%
1–4 years	41	10%
5–9 years	19	5%
10–14 years	31	8%
15–17 years	68	17%
<b>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status</b>		
Indigenous	71	18%
Non-Indigenous	327	82%
<b>Known to the child protection system</b>		
Known to Child Safety <sup>c</sup>	53	13%

a By date of death registration.

b Excludes indeterminate sex.

c In 12 months prior to death.

**Figure 1: Deaths of children aged 0–17 years in Queensland, 2004–05 to 2020–21**



### Trends from 2004 to 2021

The number of child deaths and mortality rates have generally declined over the 17 years the register has been in existence, driven to a large extent by decreases in deaths from natural causes (Figure 1). The overall child mortality rate has decreased 2.7% per year on average.<sup>iv</sup>

The largest change was in transport-related deaths, which decreased 6.6% per year on average over the period.<sup>v</sup>

Child mortality from suicide showed a slow increasing trend of 2.4% per year on average.<sup>vi</sup>

There were decreases in deaths from drowning, other non-intentional injury, unexplained causes and fatal assault and neglect, although these were not indicative of strong trends.

### Leading causes of death

The leading causes of death changes with age, largely in line with the risks faced at each development stage (Table 2).

The leading causes of death for infants 0–27 days were perinatal conditions followed by congenital anomalies. For infants 28–364 days the leading cause was SIDS and undetermined causes (as a group).

Young children aged 1–4 years are more vulnerable to external causes of death, with drowning as lead cause and transport incidents (predominantly low-speed vehicle runovers) the next non-natural cause.

Neoplasms (cancers) was a top three leading cause for each age category from one to 17 years.

Suicide and transport incidents were leading causes of death for young people aged 15–17 years, and the leading external causes for 10–14 years.

**Table 2: Leading causes of death by age, 5-year summary**

Age	#	Leading cause	%
Less than 28 days	1	Perinatal conditions	68%
	2	Congenital anomalies	27%
	3	SIDS and undetermined causes	1.5%
28–364 days	1	SIDS and undetermined causes	29%
	2	Congenital anomalies	21%
	3	Perinatal conditions	17%
1–4 years	1	Drowning	17%
	2	Congenital anomalies; Neoplasms	11%
	3	Transport	10%
5–9 years	1	Neoplasms	21%
	2	Transport	16%
	3	Congenital anomalies; Diseases of the nervous system; Drowning	12%
10–14 years	1	Neoplasms	23%
	2	Suicide	20%
	3	Transport	12%
15–17 years	1	Suicide	39%
	2	Transport	19%
	3	Neoplasms	8%

Cause of death data have been averaged over the 5-year period 2016–17 to 2020–21. Percentages are the number of deaths for each cause as a proportion of the total deaths in the age category.

## More information

This fact sheet provides summary information from the *Annual Report: Deaths of children and young people Queensland 2020–21*. Information on methodology, sources and definitions can be found in the report.

The Queensland Family and Child Commission's (QFCC) annual reports on child deaths, 17-year data tables and the latest Australian states and territories and New Zealand child death statistics can be found at <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/keeping-kids-more-safe/preventing-child-injury-death/child-death-reports-data>

## 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 genuine researchers and organisations at no cost.

Email [child\\_death\\_prevention@qfcc.qld.gov.au](mailto:child_death_prevention@qfcc.qld.gov.au)

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<sup>i</sup> The Queensland Child Death Register is based on death registrations recorded by the Queensland Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages.

<sup>ii</sup> Unintentional deaths that fall outside the scope of the more common non-intentional injury-related deaths ie. transport and drowning.

<sup>iii</sup> Includes a range of injuries such as threats to breathing, exposure to inanimate mechanical forces and exposure to forces of nature.

<sup>iv</sup> Calculated using 3-year rolling rates.

<sup>v</sup> Calculated using 5-year rolling rates.

<sup>vi</sup> Calculated using 5-year rolling rates.