Over the last three financial years the Queensland Child Death Register recorded the deaths of 153 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 61.4 deaths per 100 000 children known to child protection each year. In comparison, the Queensland average for all children was 35.0 deaths per 100 000 children aged 0–17 years.

In 2017–18, 48 of the total 385 child deaths were of children known to the child protection system. Twenty-two of these were from natural causes, 5 each were from transport and drowning, 6 were from other non-intentional injury, and 2 were suicide. The cause of death was pending for 8 deaths. No fatal assault and neglect deaths were recorded in 2017–18.

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.

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.

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

The diseases and morbid conditions mortality rate for children known to the child protection system was just above the Queensland average.

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

Sudden unexpected death in infancy (SUDI) is a category of deaths 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.
CHILD DEATH REGISTER
KEY FINDINGS 2017–18
Children known to the child protection system

Table 1: Child mortality rate by cause of death, three years to June 2018

<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>61.4</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diseases and morbid conditions</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External causes</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drowning</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other non-intentional injury</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatal assault and neglect</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sudden unexpected death in infancy (SUDI)</strong></td>
<td><strong>219.7</strong></td>
<td><strong>48.6</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Source: Queensland Child Death Register 2015–18
1. Rates are per 100 000 population aged 0–17 and are averaged over the three-year period 2015–16 to 2017–18.
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

The QFCC collects, analyses and publishes information about child deaths to help prevent future deaths and serious injuries. We work with researchers and other 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

Reports on child deaths and 14-year data tables can be found at www.qfcc.qld.gov.au on the child death reports and data page.