

Rare birth defects worry S. Africa health officials

June 25 2012

Health officials in South Africa's Eastern Cape region Monday voiced concern at the increased number of children born with rare deformities.

"There have been 50 cases of rare deformities in the past two years and five conjoined twins in less than 18 months," provincial health department spokesman Sizwe Kupelo told AFP.

The latest [birth defect](#) registered last week was that of a baby girl born to a 16-year-old, with what looked like a small penis on the forehead.

"She was born with no nose, and where there are supposed to be eyes there was nothing, just skin covered over the area," Kupelo said.

In April one baby was born with the brain exposed, only covered by a thin layer of skin.

Last year another baby was born with a heart exposed while a pair of conjoined twins shared a heart and liver.

According to Kupelo, all the children die within weeks.

"There is a local pediatrician who has shown interest in studying the possible causes," he said.

Most of the cases are treated at Nelson Mandela [Academic hospital](#) in Mthatha. Some are transferred to other hospitals outside the region with

advanced facilities.

What has puzzled [health officials](#) was the fact that the majority of the cases come from the Transkei region, one of the most impoverished and underdeveloped areas in the country, said Kupelo.

"[Health authorities](#) are doing all they can to save them, but they just don't survive," he said.

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Citation: Rare birth defects worry S. Africa health officials (2012, June 25) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-06-rare-birth-defects-africa-health.html>

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