

# Urgent action needed to further improve child survival in Ethiopia, says study

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New global research on child mortality rates in Ethiopia shows while there has been a significant decline in these rates in past three decades, too many children under the age of five are still dying.

Curtin University, the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington's School of Medicine, the Ethiopian Public Health Institute, and Ethiopia Child Mortality Collaborators worked together as part of the Global Burden of Disease (GBD) 2019 Study. They examined data across nine administrative regions and two chartered cities in Ethiopia.

The work is published in *PLOS Global Public Health* .

The analysis found that the mortality rate in the under-five demographic decreased by almost 4.5% every year between 1990 and 2019.

However, despite the progress, it's still one of the highest rates in the world, with an estimated 190,000 under 5 deaths in 2019 at the rate of 52 deaths per 1,000 live births. The country's neonatal mortality rate is 26.6 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Lead author Dr. Gizachew Tessema from the Curtin School of Population Health said that in 2019, almost three-quarters (74%) of these deaths occurred before a child's first birthday and over half (52%) in the first 28 days.

"While a baby born in Ethiopia today is three times less likely to die before age five than one born in 1990, this reduction is not enough," Dr. Tessema said. "We are still losing unacceptably too many young lives from preventable causes, such as neonatal disorders, diarrhoeal diseases and respiratory infections."

Dr. Tessema called for a concerted effort to improve the standard of care across Ethiopia, particularly in regions with predominantly rural and pastoralist communities, where both services and reporting mechanisms are sub-standard.

"We need a global investment and more domestic financing in strengthening essential obstetric, neonatal care and other child-focused services to ensure the hard-won gains in fighting [child mortality](#) and supporting Ethiopia's most vulnerable families are not lost."

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals set targets to reduce the death rate for under-five-year-olds to 25 per 1,000 live births and reduce neonatal [death](#) rate to 12 per 1,000 by 2030. With Ethiopia's [mortality](#) rates two and three times those figures, the country is unlikely to reach those targets.

Given the study uses data prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent civil war in the country, Dr. Tessema warned that the current figures could be higher, suggesting the need for urgent study.

"Ethiopia is yet establishing vital registration system and has a historical lack of reporting due to cultural and other reasons, particularly in its predominantly pastoralist communities regions," Dr. Tessema said. "This study highlights the urgent need to improve the accuracy of regional estimates, so [accurate data](#) can be used to guide both support and policy decisions."

**More information:** Gizachew A. Tessema et al, National and subnational burden of under-5, infant, and neonatal mortality in Ethiopia, 1990–2019: Findings from the Global Burden of Disease Study 2019', *PLOS Global Public Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pgph.0001471](#). [journals.plos.org/globalpublic...journal.pgph.0001471](#)

Provided by Curtin University

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