

# Texas's 2021 abortion ban tied to rise in infant deaths

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Following state legislation passed in 2021 that essentially banned abortion in Texas, the rate of infant deaths rose by almost 13%,

compared to a much smaller 1.8% rise nationwide, a new study finds.

The number of Texas babies whose deaths were specifically linked to birth defects also jumped by 22.9% in 2022, the year after the ban was put in place. In the rest of the United States, such deaths declined by 3.1% over the same time period, according to researchers at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.

The findings may have relevance beyond Texas following the July 2022 Supreme Court decision overturning *Roe v. Wade*.

"The [study] results suggest that restrictive [abortion](#) policies may have important unintended consequences in terms of trauma to families and medical cost as a result of increases in [infant mortality](#)," said researchers led by Alison Gemmill. She's an assistant professor of population, family and [reproductive health](#) at Hopkins.

The findings were [published](#) June 24 in the journal *JAMA Pediatrics*.

In their study, Gemmill's group looked at data on all recorded infant deaths from the state of Texas and 28 comparison states for the years 2018 through 2022. They zeroed in on the period between March through December of 2022, because it was during this period that fetuses and newborns would first have been subject to the 2021 Texas abortion ban.

Overall, "an excess of 216 infant deaths" was recorded in Texas between March and December of 2022, Gemmill's team reported.

The sharp rise in deaths linked to [birth defects](#) was particularly troubling, the researchers said.

"Deaths involving [congenital malformations](#), which are the leading cause

of infant mortality in the U.S. and account for more than 1 in 5 infant deaths, may increase due to forced continuation of pregnancies involving defects or other anomalies," they wrote.

Forcing women to carry through with an unwanted pregnancy may also raise financial and emotional stressors, especially among poorer, less advantaged groups, "all of which may increase exposure to known [risk factors](#) for infant mortality," Gemmill and colleagues wrote.

In a linked journal editorial, three experts in reproductive and [child health](#) said the Texas study "adds to the growing body of literature documenting the direct harms inflicted on our communities by abortion bans."

Dr. Ghazaleh Moayedi and Aketch Osamb, of Pegasus Health Justice Center in Dallas, and Dr. Atsuko Koyama, of the University of Arizona in Phoenix, all say other data shows that the 2021 ban in Texas is harming women and their babies.

"Researchers from two Dallas hospitals, including one of the busiest labor and delivery units in the country, illustrate a significant increase in maternal morbidity [illness] with subsequent poor fetal outcomes" soon after the ban was enacted, they wrote.

And they believe the new study is just a harbinger of things to come nationally.

"In the coming years, as more people continue to be harmed by abortion bans across the country, we anticipate that more research will illuminate what Texans already know to be true: Abortion bans harm everyone," the experts said.

**More information:** Alison Gemmill et al, Infant Deaths After Texas'

2021 Ban on Abortion in Early Pregnancy, *JAMA Pediatrics* (2024).  
[DOI: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2024.0885](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2024.0885)

Ghazaleh Moayed et al, Abortion Bans Harm Not Just Pregnant People—They Harm Newborns and Infants Too, *JAMA Pediatrics* (2024). [DOI: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2024.1792](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2024.1792)

To find out more about neonatal birth defects, head to the [Cleveland Clinic](#).

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