

# US infant deaths rise for first time in decades

July 25 2024, by Robin Foster

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For the first time in two decades, the infant mortality rate in the United States has risen, new government data shows.

In a [report](#) released Thursday by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, researchers found that more than 20,500 babies died in

2022 before the age of 1. Overall, there were 5.6 [infant deaths](#) for every 1,000 live births, a 3% increase from the year before.

"Infant health is one of the most important public health indicators that we have," Amanda Jean Stevenson, a demographer and assistant professor of sociology at the University of Colorado Boulder, told CNN.

"The fact that [infant mortality rates] are not continuing to decrease is a very big deal. Even flat infant mortality rates are not good," she added. "We need to see these numbers going down—and fast—because they are far too high."

In the United States, infant mortality had been generally trending down since at least 1995, but rates are still much higher in this country than they are in many other developed nations.

Why are more infants dying?

The leading causes of infant mortality stayed the same between 2021 and 2022: Congenital malformations led to nearly 1 in 5 deaths. Another 14% was caused by disorders related to short gestation and [low birth weight](#), followed by [sudden infant death syndrome](#) (SIDS), unintentional injuries and maternal complications.

But the rate of infant deaths from maternal complications jumped 9% between 2021 and 2022, from about 30 infant deaths for every 100,000 live births to more than 33 per 100,000 live births. None of the other leading causes of infant death increased significantly, the report found.

Infant health is tied tightly to [maternal health](#), and the United States has struggled for years with high rates of death among women during pregnancy, childbirth or postpartum, CNN reported.

COVID may have also played a role in the rise in infant mortality in 2022, Stevenson added. Infections in [pregnant women](#) during major surges in 2021 could have affected infants born in 2022.

Last year, a large [study](#) found that pregnant women who got COVID were nearly four times more likely to be admitted to an intensive care unit than those who weren't infected. They were also 15 times more likely to be ventilated and seven times more likely to die.

Not only that, but they faced higher risks of preeclampsia, [blood clots](#) and problems caused by [high blood pressure](#). Meanwhile, babies born to moms who had COVID were at higher risk of preterm birth and low birth weights.

In the latest report, the [infant mortality rate](#) was highest among Black infants in 2022, with nearly 11 deaths for every 1,000 live births. But the rate among American Indian and Alaska Native infants spiked more than 20% in 2022, to more than 9 deaths for every 1,000 live births. The mortality rate among White infants increased but remained lower than most other racial and ethnic groups, with about 4.5 deaths for every 1,000 [live births](#).

Further complicating the reproductive health landscape, the U.S. Supreme Court revoked the federal right to an abortion in June 2022.

[Research](#) published last month drew connections between infant mortality and abortion restrictions, finding that infant deaths spiked in Texas after the state passed a law in September 2021 that banned nearly all abortions beyond about six weeks of pregnancy.

Among the 14 states that have passed near-total bans on abortion since the Supreme Court ruling, all but two had a higher-than-average infant mortality rate in 2022, CNN reported.

**More information:** The CDC has more on [infant mortality](#).

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