Infant mortality

The phenomenon of infant mortality relates to children who die before reaching their first birthday. Absolute figures are important to enable appropriate measures to be taken in the health and social system. The number of cases occurring here obviously depends on the number of children born. When describing and analysing the phenomenon of infant mortality, the customary method is to refer the cases of infant deaths to the number of live births over the same period and to express this as a rate per thousand. Child mortality after the first birthday is measured with reference to the average number of children who survive to the same age.

Infant mortality

Infant mortality by life span

Source: Statistics Austria, Statistics on deaths

Infant mortalities by causes of death
Infectious diseases
Diseases of respiratory organs
Diseases of digestive organs
Multiple births
Immaturity
Congenital malformations
Sudden infant death syndrome
Childbirth injuries
Other perinatal causes of death
Violent causes of death
Other causes of death

The perinatal mortality rate shows the number of infant deaths during the perinatal period (encompassing stillbirths or deaths within seven days after birth).
Source: Statistics Austria, Statistics on deaths

Rate of infant mortality

The special position of infant mortality is due to the enormous risks to which babies are exposed in the early stages of life. High levels of infant mortality are typical of underdevelopment and are particularly
common in developing countries. Despite the recent increase in the incidence of infant mortality in Austria – rising from 245 (2013) to 249 (2014), 259 (2015) and 269 (2016) – this rate remained more or less constant during these four years: 3.09‰ in 2013, 3.05‰ in 2014 and 3.07‰ for both 2015 and 2016. This discrepancy can be explained by the rise in the birth rate alone. The lowest level of infant mortality to date has been three per 1,000 babies. This figure is just one hundredth of the infant mortality rate around the middle of the 19th century, when 30% of babies did not see their first birthday. From the 1870s there was a secular fall in infant mortality before it reached a tenth of its original level (30.9‰) in 1961/65. Then however, this figure stagnated (1968/72: 25.6‰), with Austria coming in last among the countries of Western Europe. It was hoped that the use of screening tests and financial incentives would further reduce the high levels of infant mortality. By 1984, i.e. ten years after introduction of the mother-and-child pass, this rate had more than halved to 11.4‰. It fell below 5‰ for the first time in 1997, followed by less than 4‰ in 2006 and under 3.5‰ (3.19) in 2012. This fall to below 3.5‰ was once again associated with a decline in post-neonatal mortality, i.e. infant mortality between the second and twelfth month of life, which is more susceptible to social factors. In the 1920s this period of life accounted for 60% of all infant deaths. Mostly recently we have seen a distinct reduction in post-neonatal levels, which fell from 30% (2006-11) to now 25% of total infant mortality (2012-16), i.e. a rate of 0.8‰.

As regards the cause of death, during the last fifteen years there has been an unmistakable decline in the incidence of sudden infant death syndrome and immaturity. On the other hand, Austria has seen an irregular, but overall slight increase in congenital deformities, i.e. merely a below-average decline in this segment of the mortality rate, falling from 1.2‰ (2001-05) to 1.1‰ (2006-11) and finally to 1.0‰.