Infant Mortality

Infant mortality is the death of any liveborn infant within the first year of life. The infant mortality rate is an important measure of overall community health, as high infant mortality rates could indicate poor maternal health, inadequate access to health care, or infant malnutrition. In the U.S., the infant mortality rate has greatly declined over the past few decades, from 20 infant deaths per 1,000 live births in 1970 to about seven deaths per 1,000 live births in 2002. However, the U.S. still ranked 27th among industrialized nations in low infant mortality in 2000. This is mostly because of disparities that continue to exist among different race/ethnic groups in the U.S. The infant mortality rate in Texas has been lower than the nationwide rate since 1979. In 2002, the infant mortality rate for Texas was 6.4 deaths per 1,000 live births, which was slightly higher than the previous few years.

In the U.S., the mortality rate for African-American infants in 2002 was 13.9 per 1,000 live births, which was higher than the mortality rate for Hispanics (5.6/1,000) or non-Hispanic whites (5.8/1,000). Teenage mothers and mothers ages 40 or older have higher infant mortality rates than other maternal ages. The mortality rate is also higher for male infants than for female infants. The leading causes of infant mortality in the U.S. are birth defects, disorders related to preterm birth and low birthweight, sudden infant death syndrome, and maternal complications. Risk factors for infant mortality include no prenatal care, smoking, inadequate weight gain during pregnancy, and having a repeat pregnancy within six months or less.

Infant Mortality in South Texas

The infant mortality rate in South Texas from 1999-2003 was 5.6 deaths per 1,000 live births. The South Texas infant mortality rate was lower than the mortality rate in the rest of Texas (6.3/1,000). Infant mortality rates were similar between Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites, both in South Texas and the rest of Texas (Figure 6.6).
For both Hispanic and non-Hispanic whites, the gender pattern for infant mortality in South Texas was the same as that seen nationwide – male infants had a higher mortality rate (6.3/1,000) than females (4.9/1,000). The Lower Rio Grande Valley region had a lower infant mortality rate than all of South Texas, while Webb County’s infant mortality rate was similar (Figure 6.7). The rate for Bexar County was higher than the South Texas rate, perhaps because this county has a relatively high percentage of African-Americans residents, compared to other South Texas areas, and African-Americans have a higher infant mortality rate than Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites.
Figure 6.7. Infant mortality rate in selected South Texas locations, 1999-2003. Source: Texas Health Data (http://soupfin.tdh.state.tx.us/birth.htm)

References

