

# Unveiling the Tragedy: Causes and Prevention of Newborn Deaths

## Introduction

The birth of a child is a moment of joy and hope, but for some families, the arrival of a newborn is marred by the tragedy of infant mortality. In this comprehensive guide, we explore the complex landscape of newborn deaths, examining the causes, risk factors, and strategies to prevent these heart-wrenching losses. Most neonatal deaths (75%) occur during the first week of life, and in 2019, about 1 million newborns died within the first 24 hours. Preterm birth, childbirth-related complications (birth asphyxia or lack of breathing at birth), infections and birth defects caused most neonatal deaths in 2019. From the end of the neonatal period and through the first 5 years of life, the main causes of death are pneumonia, diarrhea, birth defects and malaria. Malnutrition is the underlying contributing factor, making children even more vulnerable to severe diseases. Most newborn deaths take place in low and middle-income countries. It is possible to improve survival and health of newborns and end preventable stillbirths by reaching high coverage of quality antenatal care, skilled care at birth, postnatal care for mother and baby, and care of small and sick newborns. In settings with well-functioning midwife programmes the provision of Midwife-Led Continuity of Care (MLCC) can reduce preterm births by up to 24%. MLCC is a model of care in which a midwife or a team of midwives provide care to the same woman throughout her pregnancy, childbirth and the postnatal period, calling upon medical support if necessary.

## Description

With the increase in facility births (almost 80% globally), there is a great opportunity for providing essential newborn care and identifying and managing high risk newborns. However, few women and newborns stay in the facility for the recommended 24 hours after birth, which is the most critical time when complications can present. In addition, too many newborns die at home because of early discharge from the hospital, barriers to access and delays in seeking care. The 4 recommended postnatal care contacts delivered at health facility or through home visits play a key role to reach these newborns and their families.

Accelerated progress for neonatal survival and promotion of health and wellbeing requires strengthening quality of care as well as ensuring availability of quality health services for the small and sick newborn.

### Neonatal mortality: A global challenge

Neonatal mortality refers to the death of a newborn within the first 28 days of life. Globally, neonatal mortality remains a significant public health concern, with varying rates across countries and regions. Understanding the factors contributing to newborn deaths is essential for implementing effective prevention strategies.

### Prematurity and low birth weight

Premature birth and low birth weight are leading causes of newborn mortality. Preterm infants often face respiratory and other health challenges due to underdeveloped organs. Adequate prenatal care and maternal health interventions can reduce the risk of preterm birth and low

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birth weight.

#### **Birth asphyxia: The silent threat**

Birth asphyxia, or lack of oxygen at birth, is a critical cause of neonatal mortality. Prompt intervention, including resuscitation, is crucial to prevent brain damage and death. Improving intrapartum care and access to skilled birth attendants is vital.

#### **Infections: Invisible foes**

Neonatal infections, often acquired during birth, can be life-threatening. Sepsis, pneumonia, and neonatal tetanus are among the infections that pose risks. Strategies for preventing infections include clean delivery practices, maternal immunization, and neonatal care.

#### **Congenital anomalies: Genetic challenges**

Congenital anomalies, or birth defects, account for a significant portion of newborn deaths. Structural or functional abnormalities can affect various organs and systems. Prenatal screening, genetic counseling, and early medical interventions are essential for addressing congenital anomalies.

#### **Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS): A mysterious loss**

SIDS refers to the unexplained death of a seemingly healthy infant. Researchers have identified some risk factors, but the exact cause remains elusive. Safe sleep practices, like placing babies on their backs to sleep, have reduced the incidence of SIDS.

#### **Unintentional injuries and accidents**

Unintentional injuries, such as suffocation, falls, or burns, can lead to neonatal deaths. Caregiver education, childproofing the environment and safe infant products are essential for prevention.

#### **Malnutrition and lack of access to healthcare**

Malnutrition and lack of access to healthcare are critical factors contributing to newborn mortality. Adequate nutrition and regular health

check-ups are essential for newborns' survival. Efforts to improve healthcare infrastructure and promote breastfeeding play a pivotal role.

#### **Socioeconomic disparities**

Neonatal mortality rates are often higher among families with lower socioeconomic status. Disparities in access to healthcare and resources need to be addressed to reduce these gaps. Social support programs, maternal education, and targeted healthcare interventions can help mitigate disparities.

#### **Strategies for prevention and intervention**

Various preventive measures and interventions can significantly reduce newborn deaths. These include promoting maternal health, improving access to quality healthcare, early diagnosis and treatment, and public health campaigns. Collaboration among governments, healthcare providers, and non-governmental organizations is crucial for successful implementation.

#### **The role of family support**

The emotional toll of losing a newborn is profound, and family support is vital. Bereavement support, counseling, and community networks can help families cope with their loss. Raising awareness and reducing the stigma surrounding infant mortality is also essential.

## **Conclusion**

#### **The path towards hope**

Newborn deaths are a painful reality, but they are not insurmountable. With collective efforts, from improved maternal care to early interventions, we can reduce the burden of infant mortality. Every life lost is a reminder of the work that remains to be done, and every newborn saved is a testament to the power of knowledge, compassion, and the unwavering commitment to giving every child a chance at a healthy life. In our shared pursuit of preventing newborn deaths, we can bring hope to countless families and a brighter future for generations to come.