

JPIC Corner

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Coordinator's Note

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Child Mortality

A major U. N. Millennium goal is the elimination of child mortality. Its objective is to reduce the under-five mortality rate by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015.¹ While the child mortality rate has been declining in many countries,² it remains an issue of social concern. The United States, e.g., has a children mortality rate of 6.8 of 1000 children under age 5.³ The problem of child mortality often stems from the lack of proper prenatal care for mothers as well as the absence of necessary health services for the child after birth.

The welfare of children is an essential part of the praxis of Christian faith. In a culture of life, caring for children is an expression of love and respect for their inviolable dignity and worth. While this is true for all children, it "becomes all the more urgent the smaller the child is and the more it is in need of everything, when it is sick, suffering or handicapped."⁴ Christians, therefore, need to ensure that our young children in their early years of life receive essential health care in order to fully develop physically and mentally as God's children.



Photo above for illustration only.

Did you know? Every day, more than 22,000 children under five die, mostly from preventable causes.



Photo above for illustration only.

Did you know? Every year, over a million children lose their mothers to maternal death

Did You Know?

- **Each day in the United States, 1,487 babies are born pre term.**
- **Each year in the United States, about 28,000 children die before their first birthday.**
- **Every minute, a woman dies of complications related to pregnancy and childbirth (2005 data).**
- **For every woman who dies from a pregnancy-related cause, around 20 experience injury, infection, disease and disabilities.**

1. <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/goals/gti.htm>
2. <http://www.wrsc.org/story/study-finds-big-decrease-global-child-mortality>
3. http://www.google.com/publicdata?ds=wb-wdi&met=sp_dyn_imrt_in&idim=country:USA&dl=en&hl=en&q=infant+mortality+rate
4. Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, no. 244

Child Mortality: An Overview

Parents all over the world want the best for their children, including and perhaps especially that their children are healthy and safe. Yet every day, more than 22,000 children under five die, and most of these deaths are from preventable causes such as diarrhea, malaria and poor nutrition. Undernutrition alone causes at least a third of all deaths of children under five.

The good news is that several countries have reduced their child mortality rates by half or more, including: Bangladesh, Bolivia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Liberia, Madagascar, Nepal, Timor-Leste and Turkmenistan. Overall, the mortality rate for children under five in developing countries has decreased by one-third since 1990, and progress has accelerated since 2000. Yet much work still needs to be done because 8.1 million children still die each year. Sixty-four countries in the world continue to have high child mortality rates (40 or more deaths per 1,000 live births), and in some areas, the rates are much higher. For instance, as many as 1 in 14 children in Southern Asia, and 1 in 8 children living in sub-Saharan Africa never see their fifth birthday.

While the infant mortality rate in the United States has decreased significantly in the past century, it still remains higher than that of many developed nations (see article: *Infant Mortality in the United States*).



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Feast of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart

May 28th was the Feast of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. Mary is Jesus' mother, and our mother too. So this month, let us take a moment to pray for the health and safety of mothers and their children worldwide. Want our priests and brothers to say a prayer for a mother or child you know? Visit our [online Shrine to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart](#).

Infant Mortality in the United States

According to 2009 preliminary data from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), for every 1,000 live births in the United States, more than six babies died before their first birthday. According to the CIA website, the United States has a higher infant mortality rate than more than 40 other nations. For example, the current mortality rate for babies less than one year old is estimated to be about five deaths per 1,000 live births in Canada and less than three deaths in Sweden and Japan.

While the U.S. infant mortality rate is relatively high compared to many other nations, it is important to note that the rate is not uniform. There are significant differences between states and between babies born to mothers of different racial/ethnic groups. For the period 2004 through 2006, infant mortality rates ranged from 4.93 for Massachusetts to 10.63 for Mississippi (per 1,000 live births). Preliminary data from 2009 indicates that the mortality rate for black infants

was 12.71, compared to 5.64 for white infants.

The three leading causes of infant death are congenital malformations, disorders related to short gestation and low birthweight, and [sudden infant death syndrome \(SIDS\)](#). While infants born with a low birthweight are more likely to survive in the U.S. than elsewhere, relatively more babies in the U.S. have a low birthweight. In 2009, about 8% of babies were born with low birthweight (less than 5 lbs 8 oz).



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Concerned about cost of prenatal care? Find out if you are eligible for prenatal care under the [Affordable Care Act](#) or call 1-800-311-BABY (1-800-311-2229) to find out about programs in your state. For information in Spanish, call 1-800-504-7081.



Photo for illustration only

8% of babies born in the United States weigh less than 5 lbs 8oz at birth.

Healthy Newborns

One of the best ways to ensure good health for both a baby and his/her mother is for the mother to have a healthy pregnancy. Below are a couple of tips.

Get enough Folic Acid

According to the [healthfinder.gov](#) website, women of childbearing age need an extra 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day. Folic acid is a vitamin which can help prevent birth defects, but it is needed during the first few weeks of pregnancy, often before a woman knows she's pregnant. So it is better to make sure you are getting enough Folic Acid before you become pregnant. Several breakfast cereals have 100% of this vitamin (check the label) or you can look for vitamins (Folic Acid or multivitamins with Folic Acid) ([Source](#)).

Quit Smoking

Smoking while pregnant prevents the baby from getting needed nourishment and increases the risk of miscarriage, pre-term birth, and infant death ([Source](#)). Want to quit but aren't sure how to start? Find information and tools to help you quit at [www.smokefree.gov](#).

Get Informed

Talk to your doctor about steps you can take to have a healthy pregnancy. Want information delivered right to you? Check out [text4baby](#), a free text messaging service that provides health information about pregnancy and the first year of life. Service is available in both English and Spanish.

Full Term Pregnancy: How Many Weeks?

Babies born prematurely are at a higher risk of health issues than babies born at full term. In fact, disorders related to short gestation and low birthweight are one of the top three leading causes of infant mortality in the United States. But what does full term really mean? Anywhere between 37 weeks and 41 weeks is considered full term, but a newly released study, published in *Obstetrics and Gynecology*, indicates that babies born between 37 and 39 weeks of gestation have a higher infant mortality rate than those born later (between 39 and 41 weeks). The study found that in 2006, the infant mortality rate for babies born at 40 weeks was 1.9 deaths for every 1,000 live births vs. 3.9 deaths per 1,000 live births for babies born at 37 weeks.

It is important to note that the risk for both groups is relatively small, but the study may still have important implications for elective deliveries. For instance, some doctors and pregnant women schedule deliveries at 37 or 38 weeks for convenience, but this study suggests that it may be better to wait until 39 weeks (instead of 37) for such deliveries, provided that there is not a medical reason to deliver earlier.

Read the news article on the WebMD website: [Study Gives New View of Full-Term Pregnancy](#)

Maternal Health and Child Health

Despite progress since 1990, it is estimated that there were still more than 350,000 maternal deaths worldwide in 2008. For every woman who dies from a pregnancy-related cause, around 20 experience injury, infection, disease and disabilities. Every year, over a million children lose their mothers to maternal death. If a mother dies or is injured during childbirth, she is unable (or less able) to care for her other children, who are then at increased risk for poor health. Infants whose mothers die within the first six weeks of their lives are more likely to die before the age of two than infants whose mothers survive. Annually, 100,000 babies die from neonatal tetanus, which can be prevented by immunizing women of childbearing age (including during pregnancy) and making sure women give birth in clean conditions. Childbirth complications (such as obstructed labor, eclampsia and infection) that result in the death of the mother often result in the death or injury of the child as well. In addition, poor maternal health and inadequate prenatal care are contributing factors to pre-term delivery and low birthweight, which increase the risk of infant sickness and death. About 20 million babies are born each year with low birthweight.

The bottom line? Helping mothers have a healthy pregnancy and delivery increases the likelihood that the mother, the newborn child and his/her siblings will be healthy.



Fight Malaria: Help Mothers

Malaria is one example of a condition that can cause complications during pregnancy and is also more likely to affect women who are pregnant. Pregnancy reduces a woman's immunity to malaria and malaria increases the risk of stillbirth, miscarriage and low birth weight. Around 50 million pregnant women are exposed to malaria annually. By working to prevent the spread of malaria, we are also helping promote the health of pregnant women and infants.

Improving Maternal Health in the United States: How You Can Get Involved



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Promote Healthy Pregnancies

Although most pregnant women in the United States receive comprehensive prenatal care, a significant percentage (15%) do not. Among minority women, that percentage is often higher. We can promote healthy pregnancies by increasing access to early prenatal care. We can also educate ourselves and others so that we are better prepared to make healthy choices and to encourage others to do so as well.

If you or your partner is pregnant, make sure you start receiving prenatal care early. To start learning more about how to have a healthy pregnancy, check out the following websites: [Healthy Pregnancy](#); [Pregnancy and Medicines](#); [10 Tips for a Healthy Pregnancy](#); [Preventing Problems During Pregnancy](#) and [text4baby](#). You should always

Maternal Mortality in the United States



Photo for illustration only. While maternal mortality is relatively low in the US, it is still too high.

Although maternal mortality is much less frequent in the U.S. than in developing countries, and much progress has been made since the 1950s, 1 or 2 women still die each day from pregnancy complications. The leading causes of pregnancy-related death in the U.S. are hemorrhage, blood clots, high blood pressure, infection, stroke, amniotic fluid in the bloodstream and heart muscle disease. The Centers for Disease Control estimate that up to half of all pregnancy-related deaths could be prevented.

The risk of maternal death in the United States is significantly higher than in other developed nations. For instance, in 2005, the maternal mortality ratio in the United States was more than twice as high as in Australia and more than three times as high as in Sweden. Based on 2005 data, Ireland

leads the world with only 1 maternal death for every 100,000 live births, and a lifetime risk of only 1 in 47,600. By comparison, the United States had a ratio of 11 maternal deaths for every 100,000 live births (the ratio subsequently increased to 13.6 in 2006) and a lifetime risk of 1 in 4,800. Women in the United States are more likely to die due to complications in pregnancy or childbirth than almost any other industrialized nation; only Estonia has a greater lifetime risk.

Maternal Mortality, Age and Race/Ethnicity

The risk of maternal mortality increases with age. For example, in 2006, women above the age of 35 had the highest risk, (29.3 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births).

In 2006, maternal mortality among non-Hispanic white women was 9.1 per 100,000 live births in the United States. Among non-Hispanic black women, the ratio was more than three times higher: 34.8 per 100,000 live births.

Maternal Mortality by State

Aggregate statistics (from 1999 through 2004) show that the incidence of maternal mortality varies between states, from a low of 1.2 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in Maine to a high of 34.9 per 100,000 live births in the District of Columbia. The maternal mortality ratio in Georgia (20.4) is higher than that of Saudi Arabia (18) whereas the ratio in Maine is almost as low as that of Ireland.

How You Can Get Involved, Continued....

consult a physician who can answer your questions and identify and address any health risks you may face.

Get Healthy and Stay Healthy

Since pregnancy can affect other health conditions, and since a healthy pregnancy actually starts with good health prior to conception, one way to promote good maternal health is to promote good health in general. Talk to your doctor about ways you can lower high blood pressure, or better yet, prevent it. You'll enjoy better health overall, and you'll also reduce your risk of complications if you get pregnant. Other ways to improve your health include quitting smoking, eating healthy foods and exercising regularly. Make sure you are getting all

the vitamins and other nutrients that you need. Talk to your doctor before beginning any health program and then start making healthy changes to your lifestyle that will serve you well throughout life, including during pregnancy.

Work to End Domestic Violence

Over 300,000 women in the United States experience intimate partner violence during their pregnancies. Some studies indicate that homicide is a leading cause of death among pregnant women and new mothers, at least in some states. One way we can promote the safety and health of mothers in the United States is through working to end violence against women. Learn more about [domestic violence in the U.S. and how you can help stop it.](#)

Teenage Pregnancy and Child Health

In the United States, teenage pregnancy, child mortality and poor child health are all interconnected. For instance:

- Teenage mothers are more likely than mothers over the age of 25 to smoke during pregnancy (*Source*). Smoking while pregnant prevents the baby from getting needed nourishment and increases the the risk of miscarriage, preterm birth, and infant death (*Source*).
- Only 63% of mothers under age 20 get adequate pre-natal care (*Source*). Pre-natal care helps promote the health of both the mother and the baby. In addition, the children of teen mothers are less likely to visit a medical care provider (*Source*).
- Infants born to teen mothers are at an increased risk of being born prematurely and at a low birthweight (*Source*). Disorders caused by these two factors are one of the three leading causes of infant mortality in the United States. Being born prematurely and at a low birthweight increases the risk of infant death, respiratory distress syndrome, bleeding in the brain, vision loss, and serious intestinal problems.

These are some of the reasons that reducing teenage pregnancy (and teen smoking) will likely also help increase infant health. To learn more about teenage pregnancy in the United States and what you can do about it, visit our online [Social Justice Center](#) and view the [teenage pregnancy page](#), or check out the [September 2010](#) edition of [JPIC Corner](#) (also available in [PDF format](#)).

Tell us what you think!

How can we help improve the health of our infants and young children?



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Did You Know?

In the U.S., 3 in 10 girls get pregnant at least once before the age of 20. Want to learn more about teen pregnancy? Check out these articles:

- [A Health Parent-Child Relationship Reduces Risk of Teenage Pregnancy](#)
- [Teenage Pregnancy and the Cycle of Poverty](#)
- [Being “Pro-Life” - Supporting Teen Parents](#)

Please Join Us in Prayer

Please join us in prayer for the health and safety of all pregnant mothers and their children. May we continue to make progress in caring for the little ones by improving child health worldwide.

For more information about the MSC, please visit our website: www.misacor-usa.org

The MSC have made donating easy and convenient using PayPal and ParishPay.

