
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The Health of Toronto's Young Children

The *Health of Toronto's Young Children* is a series of reports that provide the most current available information on the health of Toronto children from birth to age six. These reports provide a picture of the health of Toronto's youngest residents. The series of reports uses a model of child health, described in the first report of the series, as a framework to identify key issues of significance to young children's health and indicators of young children's health. The model identifies two components of young children's health - development and functioning. The model recognizes that injuries, diseases, and disabilities can seriously reduce young children's development and/or functioning temporarily, or in some situations, their health may be affected for their entire lives.

The Health of Toronto's Young Children: The First Year of Life in Toronto

This second report in the series, *The Health of Toronto's Young Children: The First Year of Life in Toronto*, focuses on the health of Toronto's infants from birth to their first birthday. It provides information on the demographic context of the first year of life for Toronto's infants. It also presents information about birth outcomes, including diseases and disabilities apparent at birth, and highlights the impact of birth outcomes on short and long term development and functioning. The report also profiles injuries, diseases and disabilities, as well as resources during the first year of life (e.g., nutrition), which have an immediate or long term impact on health. The report summarizes available data and discusses the significant gaps in local health data related to infant health status reporting.

Highlights from the second report include:

Demographic Context

- Although the number of births to Toronto mothers is decreasing slightly, close to 25% of all births in Ontario in 2003 were to Toronto mothers.
- Women in Toronto are having children at an older age than women in the rest of the province. The median age of mothers in Toronto who gave birth in 2000 was 31 years, an increase from 29 years in 1991. In 2000, more Toronto babies were born to women 40 years or older than to women under 20.
- In 2001, approximately two out of three Toronto babies were born to women who were born outside of Canada.

Health Behaviours During Pregnancy

- 8.4% of Toronto women who gave birth between 1995 and 2001 reported having smoked during their last pregnancy, which was significantly less than the estimate for the rest of Ontario (15.8%). 8.7% of Toronto women who gave birth between 1998 and 2003 reported they had consumed alcohol.

Birth Weight

- The majority of Toronto babies are born with a healthy birth weight. Toronto has a higher healthy birth weight rate than the rest of Ontario.
- Toronto's total and singleton low birth weight (LBW) rates are higher than corresponding rates in the rest of Ontario. Over time, Toronto's total LBW rate has been increasing while the singleton LBW rate has been decreasing.
- Low birth weight and prematurity account for approximately 12% of infant deaths in Toronto.
- There is considerable variation in the rates of singleton LBW across Toronto. Rates in some areas of Toronto are 10% to 36% higher than the City's average rate of 5.2%. Factors such as neighbourhood income, mothers' country of birth and maternal age may be contributing to this disparity.
- Between 1999 and 2001, the majority of singleton LBW babies born in Toronto were born to women between 25 and 34 years old. Adolescent mothers had the highest singleton and multiple LBW rates of all age groupings.

Congenital Anomalies

- Toronto's congenital anomaly rate in 2000 was 3.9%, which represents the first noteworthy decrease since 1995. Continuous monitoring is important to determine future trends.
- Between 1997 and 2001, congenital anomalies were the third most common reason for infant hospitalization and the second leading cause of infant death in Toronto.

Congenital Infections

- From 1994 to 2003, 344 cases of congenital infections were reported in newborns in Toronto. The leading congenital infections were Hepatitis C (128 cases), group B streptococci (111 cases), ophthalmia neonatorum (37 cases), and HIV/AIDS (36 cases).

Breastfeeding

- The vast majority of Toronto women (approximately nine out of 10) begin to breastfeed their infants. However, many Toronto babies are weaned early and less than 20% of healthy term infants are exclusively breastfed for six months.
- In Toronto, older mothers, more educated mothers, and mothers living with a partner are more likely to initiate and continue breastfeeding. Mothers born outside of Canada are also more likely to initiate breastfeeding.

Vaccine Preventable Diseases

- The most frequently occurring vaccine preventable disease among Toronto infants less than one year of age is influenza, followed by varicella (chickenpox), and pertussis (whooping cough).

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)

- The proportion of infant deaths due to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) is decreasing in Toronto. From 1995-1999 (combined), SIDS accounted for 4% of all infant deaths in Toronto (43 deaths).

Summary and Conclusions

- The picture of Toronto infants' birth outcomes and health during the first year of life is incomplete.
- Available data indicates that the majority of Toronto babies have healthy birth outcomes and reach their first birthday free from major diseases, disabilities, and injury.
- There is some cause for concern regarding specific health issues such as LBW, congenital anomalies, and breastfeeding.
- Although the numbers of injuries, poisonings, congenital infections and vaccine preventable diseases are relatively small, these issues require continued attention as many of these diseases and conditions are preventable.
- There is a need to continue to monitor the health of Toronto infants and to obtain a more complete picture of their health.