



## Infant mortality gap widens between Jews and Arabs

By [Ran Reznick](#)

A 6-percent increase in infant mortality was registered this year among Israeli Arabs, compared to a 13 percent drop among Jews, according to an annual Ministry of Health report published Thursday.

In 2004, 143,956 babies were born in Israel. Of them, 681 died - 331 Jews and 350 Arabs.

According to the report, the overall infant mortality rate in 2004 was 4.73 per 1,000 live births. There were marked disparities between Jews and Arabs: the rate among Arabs was 2.8 times higher than among Jews. Deaths among Jews were 3.17 per 1000 live births, while among Arabs the rate was 8.87 per 1,000.

Prof. Yona Amitai, director of the ministry's Department of Mother, Child and Adolescent Health, who wrote the report, said that half of the difference in the rate between Arabs and Jews was explained by the greater prevalence of birth defects among Arabs as the result of higher rates of marriage between closely related individuals, especially among Muslims. The rest of the disparity was explained by the socio-economic gap between Jews and Arabs, he said.

According to the report, the highest incidence of infant mortality is among Negev Bedouin (15.8 per 1,000 live births) and Muslims (9.52 per 1,000). The lowest mortality rate was registered among Christian Arabs: 2.46 per 1,000 live births.

Amitai wrote that the data "require focusing on primary preventive action among the Muslim population, and especially among the Bedouin in the south. Prevention of birth defects requires promotion of health education and awareness about the risks of inbreeding, improvement of genetic counseling services, prenatal diagnosis and increasing use of folic acid to prevent birth defects."

According to the report, the most common cause of death among infants was premature birth - 286 babies, 42 percent of all the babies who died. The next most common reason was birth defects - 232 babies, or 34 percent of all deaths.

In 2004, the rate of mortality from birth defects among Jews was 0.82 per 1,000 live births, whereas the rate among Arabs was 4.5 times higher- 3.7 per 1,000 live births. Among Negev Bedouin the rate was 6.66 per 1,000.

In 2004, 40 infants died of sudden infant death syndrome or crib death - 6 percent of all deaths. The disparity between Jews and Arabs was also large in this category. Among Jews, the rate of sudden infant death syndrome was 0.15 per 1,000 while among Arabs it was 0.61 per 1,000.

Again according to the report, 105 babies died because of multiple-foetus births, compared to 175 who died for this reason in 2002.