Newborns with low birth weight (%)

Rationale for use

The low birth weight rate at the population level is an indicator of a public health problem that includes long-term maternal malnutrition, ill health and poor health care. On an individual basis, low birth weight is an important predictor of newborn health and survival.

Definition

Percentage of live born infants with birth weight less than 2,500 g* in a given time period.

* Low birth weight may be subdivided into very low birth weight (less than 1500 g) and extremely low birth weight (less than 1 000 g).

Associated terms

**Birth weight** is the first weight of the fetus or newborn obtained after birth. For live births, birth weight should ideally be measured within the first hour of life before significant postnatal weight loss occurs.

**Low birth weight** is defined as a weight of less than 2500 g (up to and including 2499 g) irrespective of the gestational age.

**Live birth** (see Probability of dying under age 5 years).

Data sources

- Health service statistics: Proportion of live births with low birth weight among births in health institutions.

- Household Surveys: Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) include questions on birth weight as well as the mothers’ subjective assessment of the infant’s size at birth (i.e. very large, larger than average, average, smaller than average, very small), for births in the last 3-5 years.

Methods of estimation

Where reliable health service statistics with a high level of coverage exist ; “Percentage of low birth weight” births.

For household survey data different adjustments are made according to the type of information available (numerical birth weight data or subjective assessment of the mother).

Disaggregation

By location (urban/rural, major regions/provinces), sex, and socio-economic characteristics (e.g. mother’s education level, wealth quintile).

References


Database

- Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS): (http://www.measuredhs.com)

- WHO, European Office. HFA database: (http://www.who.dk/hfadb)

Comments

The large proportion of infants not weighed at birth and the estimates based on mothers' subjective assessments constitute a significant impediment to accurate monitoring of low birth weight.