

## Northern Region, Israel

Acre

### General overview

The Northern Region of Israel covers approximately 4500 km<sup>2</sup>, 21% of the total territory of the country (22 000 km<sup>2</sup>) (2016). The Region borders Lebanon to the north, Syria and Jordan to the east, and the Palestinian Authority to the south. In 2016, the population in the Region counted approximately 1 401 300, about 20% of the whole Israeli population (8 628 600), with an almost equal distribution of Arab and Jewish citizens. The Arab population includes: Muslims, Druses (a separate religion descending from Islam), Circassia's (Muslims originating from Caucasia in the south of Asia), and a minority of Christian Arabs (1,2).

The Northern Region includes 437 settlements

in 94 authorities: 17 cities, 15 regional councils and 62 local councils (with various settlement modalities: cities, villages, kibbutzim, agricultural communities).

In 2016, life expectancy in Israel was 84.1 years (80.7 years for men and 84.2 years for women). Among the Jewish population, life expectancy was 84.5 years (80.9 years for men and 84.5 years for women) and for the Arab population it was 81.1 years (76.9 years for men and 81.1 years for women) (1).

Table 1 allows a comparison of the mortality and fertility rates for the Northern Region with those for the whole of Israel in 2016 (1).

**Table 1. Life expectancy and mortality and fertility rates, Israel and the Northern Region, 2016**

Area	Rates Israel			Rates Northern Region		
	Overall	Arab	Jewish	Overall	Arab	Jewish
Infant mortality	3.1	6.4	2.2	2.2	4.4	3.0
Standardized death rate	5.0	6.3	6.3	6.3	5.9	5.3
Crude death rate	5.2	2.7	5.8	5.8	2.7	6.8
Fertility rate	3.1	3.3	3.2	3.2	2.7	3.0

Some of the unique characteristics of the Northern Region are the following.

- The Region is relatively large with a multicultural society, but there is a lack of work, health and educational services, roads and

public transport. The birth rate is high (5–7 and more children among orthodox families) and congenital birth defects are not uncommon.

- The Region has many tourist attractions and recreational destinations.
- It has coped successfully in absorbing an influx immigrants from Ethiopia and countries of the former Soviet Union, and refugees from South Lebanon, Sudan and Darfur.
- The Northern Region is a health-promoting Region, its public health vision being to create a healthy and supportive environment (through programmes such as: “Northern Region – Smoke Free Region”, “Healthy Lifestyle” (focusing on physical activity and nutrition), and “One Stop Shop” (health preparedness for preschool children).
- The Region participates in the WHO Regions for Health Network.

The Israeli Health Ministry is decentralized to 6 Regional Health Offices. In the Northern Region there are 5 District Health Offices: Acre, Kinneret, Nazareth, Safed and Yizrael.

The Public Health Services of the Ministry of Health have adopted the WHO approach to enhancing global health security and preventing chronic diseases by creating a healthy and supportive environment for the benefit of individuals and communities. The Northern Region seeks in practice to prevent and control morbidity and improve the quality of life of its citizens through maintenance of and improvement in collaboration between the various health and medical organizations (governmental, nongovernmental, public, private, international) and between these organizations and communal groups.

The Regional Health Office is viewed as a “mini ministry”, employing about 700 people (equal percentage of Arabs and Jews), including 55 medical doctors (specialists in public health, psychiatrists, dentists, gynecologists and pediatricians), 400 nurses, and lawyers, engineers, pharmacists, psychologists, physiotherapists, technicians and clerks/

secretaries. It participates in determining national and local health policy and measures needed to implement and execute it. To this end, it collects information on the health needs of the population for use in building, implementing and evaluating tailor-made health-promotion programmes. The Regional Health Office also coordinates and supervises various medical and health providers, such as individual preventive services, health-maintenance organizations, private clinics, hospitals, nursing homes, dental clinics and pharmacies, as well as educational institutes, sewage and water systems, beaches and swimming pools, food-producing factories and businesses, and non-medical treatment centres.

In addition, the Regional Health Office is responsible for preparedness to respond in emergencies, such as outbreaks of war and disease and natural disasters, and for ensuring immediate access to adequately equipped medical services.

The Northern Region is running two successful programmes related to maternal and child health: “Tipat halav” (“A drop of Milk”) and the “One stop shop” programme, which is a subprogramme of the first mentioned.

The “A drop of milk” programme involves 320 mother/child clinics spread out in the Region, which deal mainly with prevention. These conduct: follow up of pregnant women and newborns; screening tests for and the follow up of genetic and congenital diseases and malformations, phenylketonuria and hypothyroidism, among others; and routine childhood vaccinations. The programme also includes health-education consultations in the areas of physical activity, nutrition, breastfeeding/ substitutes and contraceptives.

The “One stop shop” programme focuses on children about to enter the first grade who are invited to their nearest Tipat Halav location with their parents for a series of screening tests. Fifty children are invited to each session (out of a total of 26 000 in the Region). The sessions include: eye examinations (by an optometrist); hearing tests; vaccinations (given by school nurses

specializing in first and second graders); and height and weight measurement. All children participating in the programme are given a certificate stating that they are about to enter the first grade, a modest gift and a refrigerator

magnet with tips about “healthy sandwiches”. The screening tests and preventive measures ensure that each child entering the first grade does so under optimal conditions.



## Strengths

The Northern Region’s strengths include:

- ✓ highly qualified, skilled and devoted human resources;
- ✓ creativity and “thinking outside the box”;
- ✓ multi-year work plans.



## Aspirations

The Northern Region is aiming to:

- ✓ establish a “golden age clinics” network for the older population (with a similar concept to that of the “Tipat Halav” programme mentioned above) to maintain and improve health and well-being in this age group;
- ✓ reinforce and enhance preventive health care in all the schools in the Northern Region (there are approximately 784 schools with about 230 000 children in the 6–18-years age group with risk-behaviour issues, such as alcohol, drug and tobacco use, unsafe sex, etc.);
- ✓ confront the trend in overweight and obesity to reduce the increasing rate of diabetes mellitus, especially among the Arab population (the incidence rate among adult Arab citizens in Israel compared to adult Jewish citizens is significantly higher (2)).



## Challenges

These are the need to:

- ✓ enhance collaboration between governmental and nongovernmental organizations dealing with public health;
- ✓ disseminate real-time data and information to the public on the sanitary status of food factories businesses and restaurants;
- ✓ establish an information and guidance centre for all issues related to the elderly population (morbidity, hospitalization, social services and others).



## Potential areas of collaboration

The Northern Region is interested in collaborating with other regions on:

- ✓ developing software to inform the public about the sanitary status of food factories, restaurants and businesses;
- ✓ developing a model information-and-guidance centre for the elderly population;
- ✓ increasing health literacy and improving shared decision making;
- ✓ facilitating brainstorming in the Regions for Health Network on developing healthy conditions in workplaces, leisure-time settings, etc.



## Working groups

The Northern Region is interested in participating in working groups on:

- ✓ women's/men's health;
- ✓ health systems/primary health care;
- ✓ the all-of-government approach/intersectoral action.



## People active in the Regions for Health Network (RHN)

*Focal point*

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## References

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2. State of Israel Ministry of Health. Health status in Israel 2008. Publication 333. Ramat Gan: The Israel Center for Disease Control (ICDC); 2011.

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