

Factsheet on preterm birth in Sierra Leone

What is preterm birth?

A preterm birth is when a baby is born alive but before 37 weeks of pregnancy are completed.¹ Every year, 23,000 babies are born preterm in Sierra Leone (2015 estimate).^{2,3,a} This is one in every 10 babies born alive in Sierra Leone.^{2,c}

Preterm birth is a public health problem in Sierra Leone

Babies born too soon are approximately seven times more likely to die during the first four weeks of their lives than babies born at term.⁴ In Sierra Leone, one in four newborn deaths are due to preterm birth complications (2013 estimate).^{5,c} Prematurity is the second largest cause of death for babies in the first month of life⁵, with 2,100 newborn deaths due to preterm birth every year.^{5,6,d}

In addition, preterm survivors often suffer from lifelong disabilities, such as visual and hearing impairments, chronic lung disease, long term cardiovascular ill-health, learning and behavioural impairments.¹ Prematurity has a far-reaching impact on their development and on their health as children and adults.

What can be done in Sierra Leone?

Many of these deaths could be prevented, through both prevention of preterm birth, and care for the premature baby.

- Ⓒ Adolescent pregnancy, older age pregnancy, short time gaps between births, chronic and infectious diseases, and unhealthy pre-pregnancy weight increase the risk of preterm birth¹
- Ⓒ Family planning strategies, including birth spacing and adolescent-friendly services, can reduce the risk of preterm birth¹
- Ⓒ Encourage early initiation and exclusive breastfeeding¹
- Ⓒ Quality antenatal and postnatal care, along with skilled care at delivery, can help to reduce deaths due to preterm birth. Investing in trained and equipped health workers is key, with a focus on the 48 hours surrounding birth¹
- Ⓒ In August 2015, the World Health Organization (WHO) published new recommendations to improve the survival and health of babies born too soon⁷. Decision-makers should review and revise national clinical guidelines and essential medicines lists; promote the new recommendations widely; strengthen the skills of health workers to deliver the interventions; support health workers to accurately assess gestational age; and monitor adherence to the guidelines.⁷

In 2014 Sierra Leone committed to the Every Newborn Action Plan⁸. This strategy sets out the priority solutions, and calls for a united effort to dramatically reduce maternal and newborn deaths, and preventable stillbirths.

We must prioritise the evidence-based, cost-effective and feasible solutions in all health facilities that provide pregnancy and delivery services, as well as ensure better data collection on pregnancy outcomes to enable responsive action where it is most needed.

Now is the time to scale up quality care to all women and newborns for them to survive, thrive and transform society!





Prematurity in Sierra Leone

Number of newborn deaths in the first month of life (2015)⁹	7,600
Mortality rate in the first month of life (per 1000 babies born alive) (2015) ⁹	35 /1000
Preterm birth rate (as a % of babies born alive) (2010)²	10.0 %
Country rank for preterm birth rate (2010) ²	97
Number of babies born preterm (2015)^{2,3,a}	23,000
Country rank for number of babies born preterm (2015) ^{2,3,a}	81
Number of newborn deaths due to preterm birth complications (2015)^{5,6,d}	2,100
Share of newborn deaths caused by preterm birth complications (2013) ^{5,c}	27%
Demand for family planning satisfied (2013)¹⁰	40%
Antenatal care of four or more visits (2013) ¹⁰	76%
Skilled attendant at delivery (2013)¹⁰	60%
Mothers who received postnatal care within two days of birth (2013) ¹⁰	73%
Women initiating breastfeeding within 1 hour of birth (2013)¹⁰	54%
Proportion of babies aged 0-5 months who are exclusively breastfed (2013) ¹⁰	32%

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Notes:

- a. We calculated the number of preterm births in Sierra Leone by using the most recent preterm birth rate (2010)² and applying this to the 2015 estimate of live births³. In Sierra Leone, the estimated number of live births for 2015 is 229,200³. The 2010 preterm birth rate is applied to the 2015 live birth estimate: (10.0067/100)* 229,200=22,935.3564 (rounded to 23,000).
- b. The preterm birth rate is 10.0%²; this is equivalent to 1 baby out of every 10 being born preterm.
- c. In Sierra Leone, the estimated number of newborn deaths for 2013 is 9,430 and the estimate number of deaths due to preterm birth complications is 2,566.⁵ These estimates were used to calculate the proportion of newborn deaths due to preterm birth complications: (2,566/9,430)*100=27.211% (1 in 4).
- d. We calculated the number of deaths due to preterm birth complications in the first 28 days of life in Sierra Leone by using the latest data (2013) on the proportion of newborn deaths from preterm birth (27.211%)^{5,c} and applying this to the 2015 estimate of the number of newborn deaths (7,615)⁹. This is equivalent to: (27.211/100)* 7,615 = 2072(rounded to 2,100). 2,100 is the estimated number of deaths due to preterm birth complications in the first 28 days of life in Sierra Leone in 2015. If including those who die from preterm birth complications between 0 and 5 years the figure is 3,300 (estimate provided by Healthy Newborn Network, 2015).