



# Births



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# Births

## Abstract

Birth statistics measure the number of births registered in New Zealand.

Stats NZ is the principal agency responsible for processing and publishing vital statistics in New Zealand, including birth statistics. It seeks to provide information that meets the legal, public policy and community requirements for up-to date official statistics at the local, regional and national level.

## Purpose

Under the provisions of the Births, Deaths, Marriages, and Relationships Registration Act 1995, every birth occurring in New Zealand must be registered.

Birth statistics provide local authorities, health authorities, and research institutions with information needed to plan future and current social services. Within Stats NZ, births data are used to calculate population estimates, population projections and fertility rates.

## Population

Births Population

Every live birth and stillbirth registered in New Zealand.

## Births Data Collection

### Methodology

Under the provisions of the Births, Deaths, Marriages, and Relationships Registration Act 1995, every birth occurring in New Zealand must be registered.

By law, both parents of a child born in New Zealand must jointly notify Births, Deaths and Marriages (a division of the Department of Internal Affairs). Online birth registration is completed via the Smart Start webpage (<https://smartstart.services.govt.nz/>) or a birth registration form (BDM27) is filled in and sent as soon as is reasonably practicable after the birth (deemed by the Registrar-General as generally being within two months of the birth).

Stats NZ receives a monthly electronic file of registered births from Births, Deaths and Marriages which includes some but not all of the information collected on the birth registration. Stats NZ has the responsibility for processing and publishing birth statistics derived from the birth registrations. Stats NZ does not code all of the information supplied by Internal Affairs.

Birth data are published quarterly and unless otherwise stated refer to births by date of registration not the date of birth.

#### **To June 1998**

Up until the end of December 1997, information from the BDM9 and BDM27 was sent to Stats NZ from the 74 registration offices located around New Zealand. The information was supplied in paper forms in monthly batches.

#### **From January 1998 to June 1998**

Births, Deaths, and Marriages computerised the vitals collection system from 1 January. Births, Deaths, and Marriages continued to supply the paper forms up to June 1998.

#### **From July 1998**

From 1 July 1998 onwards Births, Deaths, and Marriages supplied Stats NZ with an electronic copy of the birth registration record. From this record Statistics NZ codes responses to standard statistical classifications.

Stats NZ receives a monthly electronic file of birth registrations from Births, Deaths and Marriages. Stats NZ is responsible for processing and publishing birth statistics derived from the birth registrations. Birth data are published quarterly and unless otherwise stated refers to births by date of registration not the date of birth.

#### **Requirements from the Births, Deaths, Marriages, and Relationships Registration Act 1995**

(i) Preliminary notice of birth (Section 5A)

- (1) A preliminary notice must be given in accordance with this section for each birth in New Zealand.
  - (2) If a birth takes place during or immediately before the mother's admission to hospital, the occupier of the hospital must give the preliminary notice.
  - (3) If a birth does not take place during or immediately before the mother's admission to hospital, the preliminary notice must be given by—
    - (a) a doctor, if he or she is present at the birth; or
    - (b) a midwife, if he or she is present at the birth but a doctor is not present; or
    - (c) the occupier of premises where the birth takes place or where the mother is admitted immediately after the birth, if neither a doctor nor a midwife is present.
  - (4) A preliminary notice is given by completing, signing, and giving the standard form preliminary notice to a Registrar within 5 working days after the birth.
  - (5) The Registrar-General must notify the Director-General of Health of all still-births for which a preliminary notice has been given.
- (ii) Registration of Birth Notified Late (Section 16)
- No Registrar other than the Registrar-General shall register a birth notified more than 2 years after the birth.
  - Every live birth and stillbirth must be notified to a registrar by the hospital, doctor or midwife within 5 working days of the birth. A 'birth notice' (BDM9) or 'birth schedule' (BDM9A) includes the mother's contact details, length of gestation and the baby's weight.
  - By law, both parents of a child born in New Zealand must jointly notify Births, Deaths, and Marriages (a division of the Department of Internal Affairs), as soon as is reasonably practicable after the birth (deemed by the Registrar-General as generally being within two months of the birth). However, a registrar can register a child up to 2 years after their birth. After 2 years the birth can only be registered by the Registrar-General (this is known as a 'late birth' or 'section 16' birth).
  - Online registration or a 'Notification of Birth for Registration' form (BDM27) must be completed (generally by the parents) and forwarded to the registrars at Births, Deaths and Marriages. Information from the BDM27 is then matched with information from the BDM9 form. If no BDM27 form is received, Births, Deaths and Marriages sends out a reminder notice based on the information from the BDM9.
  - Between 2006 and 2008, there were an average of around 800 late registrations per year (roughly 1 percent of live births). About one-half of the late registrations were registered within 4 years of birth and about nine out of ten within eight years of birth.

## Collection Events

**1848-12 -**

### Intended Frequency

Quarterly

Date	1848 -
Spatial Coverage	New Zealand

### Significant events impacting this study series

#### Important Dates Relating to Birth Statistics

1844 - Vital Statistics first published as part of "Statistics of New Zealand" (blue book).

1847 - Registration Ordinance Act.

This made provision for a record of births and deaths being kept by the state.

1848 - Non-compulsory registration of births and deaths introduced. Notification of births and deaths was compulsory.

1858 - The Registration Act.

This act provided for compulsory registration of births, deaths and marriages.

1859 - Compulsory registration of births, deaths and marriages introduced.

1875 - The Registration of Births and Deaths Act.

This act required further information regarding births and deaths to be provided at the time of registration.

1893 - New Zealand's official yearbook first published in its present form.

1894 - Legitimation Act.

Under this Act any child born out of wedlock whose parents later married, was legitimised by the marriage on the birth being registered in the manner prescribed by the Act.

1908 - Re-enactment of Legitimation Act.

1910 - Collection of Vital Statistics entrusted to the Government Statistician (formerly the responsibility of the Registrar-General).

1912 - Births and Deaths Registration Amendment Act.

Established regulations for the registration of Māori births and deaths and also made provision for the registration of stillbirths. Māori births and deaths were recorded on a separate register from non-Māori.

1913 - Compulsory registration of Māori births and deaths established. Also compulsory registration of stillbirths established.

1914 - Monthly Abstract of Statistics first published.

1921 - Vital Statistics report first published. Previously vital statistics were published in the blue book.

1921-22 - Legitimation Amendment Act.

Repeated stipulation that legitimation could be affected only if at the time of the birth of the child there existed no legal impediment to the marriage of the father and mother.

1924 - Births and Deaths Registration Act.

Consolidated and revised previous legislation regarding the registration of births and deaths.

1928 - New Zealand Pocket Digest of Statistics first published.

1930 - Births and Deaths Amendment Act.

This act directs the omission of the word 'illegitimate' from the register when the birth of an illegitimate child is registered.

1939 - Legitimation Act.

This act repealed previous legislation on the subject and stipulated that every illegitimate person whose parents have married shall be deemed to be legitimised from birth by reason of the marriage.

1942 - Commencement of collection of Māori stillbirths.

1951 - The Births and Deaths Registration Act.

This act set down the regulations regarding birth and death registration. It also contained provisions for the registration of adopted children.

1955 - Adoption Act.

This act contains the regulation for the registration of adopted children.

1961 - The Births and Deaths Registration Amendment Act.

This act repealed the definitions of a Māori with respect to birth and death registration. It also modified the regulations regarding illegitimate births and adoptions.

1962 - Abolition of Māori birth and death registers. The format of the vitals report was changed. All tables were now compiled for Total and Māori populations rather than Non-Māori and Māori populations.

1984 - Review Committee on Fertility and Related Statistics made significant recommendations for changes to the birth registration forms.

1984 - Review Committee on Ethnic Statistics initiated by Government Statistician.

1987 - Last year of publication of annual volume on vital statistics, some information incorporated into Demographic Trends.

1988 - The Review committee on Ethnic Statistics produced a report which had significant implications for the collection of birth and death registration information.

1995 - Births, Deaths, Marriages, and Relationships Registration Act 1995.

Introduced new birth and death registration forms. A major change was the introduction of new ethnicity and Māori descent questions (consistent with those used in the 1996 Census).

1995 - As part of government restructuring the public registries group of Department of Justice was split up from October 1st. Internal Affairs was given responsibility for births, deaths and marriages.

1995 - The Births, Deaths, Marriages, and Relationships Registration Act 1995, which took effect from 1 September 1995, redefined what constituted a stillbirth. Stillbirths recorded after 1 September 1995 include some stillbirths which would have fallen outside the definition of the previous act.

1996 - Following the 1996 Census of Population and Dwellings, Stats NZ changed its standard statistical concept for deriving population estimates and projections from the de facto population to the resident population.

1998 - Ministry of Health ceased requiring vitals data from Stats NZ. As a result some information no longer coded (locality of birth, birth weight, length of gestation, parents' occupation).

1998 - Internal Affairs computerised the vitals collection system from 1 January. Data now provided electronically to Stats NZ and supply of birth, death and marriage registration forms phased out. Data from 1 July processed by Stats NZ using new LAN-based system.

1998 - Births in 1998 are lower than expected because of a small change to the rate at which births were registered during 1998.

2004 - As of 1 February 2004, Internal Affairs send their first reminder letters out 28 days from the child's date of birth (instead of 42 days). (The timing of the second reminder letter remains unchanged at 60 days.)

2004 - The number of stillbirths registered in the March 2004 quarter is higher than expected due to changes in the follow-up procedures used for outstanding registrations by the Department of Internal Affairs. An unknown number of stillbirths registered in the March 2004 quarter would have been expected to be registered in previous quarters up to two years earlier.

2005 - Ethnicity question changed to that asked in the 2001 Census.

2006 - From 1 January 2006 ethnicity has been coded according to the 2005 ethnicity classification.

2006 - From 1 January 2006 children born in New Zealand will only be NZ citizens if either of their parents are NZ citizens or entitled to permanent residency. Questions on the parents citizenship and residency are now included on the registration form. In addition, questions on the parents marital status now include civil union and de facto relationship options.

2006 - Banks Peninsula District amalgamated with Christchurch City on 6 March 2006. Births and deaths registered to people resident in the Banks Peninsula District prior to 6 March 2006 are included with the Christchurch City figures.

2009 - Changes to the Births, Deaths, Marriages, and Relationships Registration Act 1995 came into effect on 25 Jan 2009 requiring both parents to sign the registration form except in prescribed circumstances.

2016 - Births and deaths data from the March 2016 year onwards has been randomly rounded to protect confidentiality. Individual figures may not add up to totals, and values for the same data may vary in different tables. Median ages from the March 2016 year data have been recalculated using randomly rounded data. We are committed to ensuring confidentiality by not releasing information that could identify individuals. Random rounding is used to disguise small counts, but all cells in a table are randomly rounded. Counts that are already a multiple of three are left unchanged. Those not a multiple of three are rounded to one of the two nearest multiples. For example, a one will be rounded to either a zero or a three. Each value in the table is rounded independently. This means counts may not sum to totals, but ensures that published totals are within two of the original number.

2016 - SmartStart was launched by DIA to the public in December 2016. It is a helpful tool for new and expectant parents. Birth registrations, along with accessing an IRD number for a baby can be completed online via SmartStart. SmartStart also contains a range of information needed by new and expectant parents, including access to antenatal classes, Plunket, along with developmental information.

### Changes to ethnic statistics from the birth registration form

**Before September 1995** - Prior to September 1995, the birth registration form collected information on the degree of Māori or Pacific Island blood and the tribe or island of the newborn's mother and father. If the parents were not of Māori or Pacific Island descent no ethnic details were required. For statistical purposes this residual group was generally categorised as 'non-Māori', 'non-Pacific Island'. However, if any Māori or Pacific Island parents failed to answer the question then the birth was also categorised as 'non-Māori', 'non-Pacific Island'.

The question produced two types of responses: Māori or Pacific Island people (defined as those who had half or more Māori or Pacific Island blood) and non-Māori and non-Pacific Island people. It was recognised as limiting as there was no way of separately identifying other ethnic groups (eg Asian, European). Also, from 1986 (when the census ethnic question embraced the concept of self-identification), the inconsistencies between the ethnic vitals question and the ethnic census question became marked. The two data sets (registration-based vital events and census population) were based on different concepts and this added to the complexities of accurately measuring ethnic differentials in fertility.

**From September 1995** - The introduction of a new birth registration form in September 1995 marked a major milestone in ethnic statistics. The new birth registration form included an ethnic question consistent with the concept of ethnic self-identification. In addition a question on Māori descent is included. The registration form includes ethnicity and Māori descent questions for the mother, father and child.

Initially, the ethnic question on the birth registration form was the same as that asked in the 1996 Census of Population and Dwellings. It asked the respondent to tick as many circles as needed to show which ethnic group the mother, father and child belonged to. During 2005, the ethnic question was changed on the birth registration form to be consistent with that in the 2001 Census of Population and Dwellings. It asked the respondent to tick the box or boxes which applied.

The ethnic question based on self-identification resulted in:

- A small increase in the number of births belonging to one, or both, of the Māori and Pacific ethnic groups.
- A much greater range of ethnic groups being identified. For example, it is now possible to identify ethnic groups such as Chinese, Indian or NZ European.
- Multiple ethnic responses being generated as a result of respondents having the opportunity to select more than one ethnic group.
- The ability to monitor the level of non-response to the ethnicity question.

The implications of these results are:

- It is now possible to generate ethnic-specific fertility rates as well as to calculate population estimates and projections for a wider range of ethnic groups.
- It will be possible to more accurately gauge the specific needs of ethnic groups and, for the first time, detail on smaller ethnic minorities will be available.

These changes are an important outcome of the ongoing evaluation of statistical concepts and definitions designed to introduce consistency to ethnic questions and classifications across a range of statistical surveys.

**From January 2006** - From 1 January 2006 ethnicity is coded according to the 2005 ethnicity classification. The new classification consists of six broad ethnic groups (European, Māori, Pacific, Asian, MELAA (Middle Eastern, Latin American and African) and Other) compared with five under the previous classification (European, Māori, Pacific, Asian and Other). In addition, a new ethnicity 'New Zealander' has been created within the Other group. Previously 'New Zealander' type responses (eg Kiwi) were coded to New Zealand European.

### Frequency

- Quarterly

### Usage and limitations of the data

Examples of Uses:

Population estimates

Population projections

Life tables

Analysis of trends in age-specific, ethnic-specific and total fertility rates

Infant mortality

International comparisons

Limitations of birth registration data

### Children of this Relationship

The birth registration form asks whether there are any other children of this relationship. However, it is possible that children from previous relationships are included. Unfortunately, this question does not produce an accurate measure of all live births to a woman (needed for accurate measures of birth parity). For privacy reasons it is deemed unacceptable to ask women about children outside their current relationship.

### Reminder notices:

Up to two reminder notices are sent to parents to ensure a birth registration form is completed. The timing of these reminder notices has varied over time. This change in timing can affect the lag time between the date of a birth and the date of its registration.

### Main users of the data

Stats NZ, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, District Health Boards, Local Government

## Related Materials

### Related documentation

- [Births webpage](#)

## Variables

## Concepts

### Births

Name	Description
Birth	<b>Birth</b> Includes both live birth and stillbirth.
Birth Order	<b>Birth Order</b> An identifying number which is used in multiple births to show which child is the first born, second born, etc.
Birth Rate (Crude)	<b>Birth Rate (Crude)</b> The number of live births per 1,000 mean population.
Birthweight	<b>Birthweight</b> Weight of infant at time of birth (eg 3,129 g, 3.129 kg).
Confinement	<b>Confinement</b> A pregnancy resulting in either liveborn or stillborn children. Such an event is counted as one confinement irrespective of whether a single or multiple birth results.
Ex-nuptial Birth	<b>Ex-nuptial Birth</b> A child born to parents who are not legally married or in a civil union at the time of birth. Ex-nuptial births include births to parents in a consensual union.
Fertility (demography)	<b>Fertility (demography)</b> The actual level of reproduction of a population, based on the number of live births that occur. Fertility is normally measured in terms of women of childbearing age, defined as 15-49 years, although births to women outside this age range can, and do, occur. Fertility should not be confused with fecundity, which is the biological capacity of a population to bear children.

Foetal Death	<p><b>Foetal Death</b> Death prior to the complete expulsion or extraction from its mother of a product of conception, irrespective of gestation, by either spontaneous abortion (miscarriage), induced abortion or stillbirth. Death is indicated by the fact that after such separation the foetus does not breathe or show any other evidence of life, such as beating of the heart, pulsation of the umbilical cord or definite movement of voluntary muscles.</p> <p>The three major categories of foetal death recommended by the World Health Organisation are: early foetal deaths at less than 20 completed weeks of gestation intermediate foetal deaths at 20 or more, but less than 28, weeks of gestation late foetal deaths at 28 weeks or more of gestation.</p>
Gestation	<p><b>Gestation</b> The time period between conception and actual birth. For live births, this is usually 41 weeks.</p>
Live Birth	<p><b>Live Birth</b> The birth of a child, who breathes or shows any other evidence of life, such as beating of the heart, pulsation of the umbilical cord or definite movement of voluntary muscles, whether or not the umbilical cord has been cut or the placenta is attached. All liveborn infants should be registered and counted as such, irrespective of length of gestation or whether alive or dead at the time of registration. If they die at any time following birth, they should also be registered and counted as deaths.</p>
Stillbirth	<p><b>Stillbirth</b> A dead foetus that: weighs 400g or more when issued from its mother; or is issued from its mother after the 20th week of gestation.</p> <p>The Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1995, which took effect from 1 September 1995, redefined what constituted a stillbirth. Before the new Act a stillbirth was defined as a child born dead after 28 weeks of gestation. This change in definition means that stillbirths from September 1995 onwards are not directly comparable with earlier years.</p>
Issue	<p><b>Issue</b> The number of children liveborn and stillborn to a mother from a given confinement.</p>
Late Registration	<p><b>Late Registration</b> A birth registered more than two years after it occurred. Section 16 of the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1995 (Section 14 of the Births and Deaths Registration Act 1951) states that no birth can be registered after two years without the approval of the Registrar-General.</p> <p>Birth statistics and derived birth rates released by Stats NZ generally exclude late registrations.</p>
Neonatal Death	<p><b>Neonatal Death</b> The death of a child (who was born alive) before the age of 28 days. The neonatal mortality rate is the number of neonatal deaths per 1,000 live births.</p>
Nuptial Birth	<p><b>Nuptial Birth</b> A child born to parents who are legally married or in a civil union at the time of birth.</p>
Perinatal Death	<p><b>Perinatal Death</b> These are stillbirths plus early neonatal deaths (infant deaths under 7 days of age). The perinatal mortality rate is the number of perinatal deaths per 1,000 births.</p>
Post-neonatal Death	<p><b>Post-neonatal Death</b> The death of a child (who was born alive) from age 28 days but before the age of one year. The post-neonatal mortality rate is the number of post-neonatal deaths per 1,000 live births.</p>

Registrar-General	<p><b>Registrar-General</b></p> <p>A national birth, death and marriage registration service has been operating in New Zealand since the 1840s and is administered by the Registrar-General under the auspices of the Department of Internal Affairs. The Registrar-General is responsible for the compilation, maintenance and preservation of a national genealogical record and provision of a certificate service.</p>
Total Fertility Rate	<p><b>Total Fertility Rate</b></p> <p>The average number of live births that a woman would have during her life if she experienced the age-specific fertility rates of a given period (usually a year). It excludes the effect of mortality.</p>
Total Pregnancy Rate	<p><b>Total Pregnancy Rate</b></p> <p>The average number of pregnancies a woman would have during her life if she experienced the age-specific pregnancy rates of a given period (usually a year). It excludes the effect of mortality.</p>
Vital Statistics	<p><b>Vital Statistics</b></p> <p>Statistics of events such as births, deaths and marriages which influence the numbers of a population.</p>
Previous Issue	<p><b>Previous Issue</b></p> <p>The number of children liveborn to a mother prior to the current confinement.</p>

## De Facto Relationship

Name	Description
Consensual Union	<p><b>Consensual Union</b></p> <p>Two people usually living in the same dwelling, but not in a registered marriage to each other, who: share mutual concern for each other; have a degree of economic, social and emotional interdependence; and consider their relationship to be akin to marriage.</p>
Partner	<p><b>Partner</b></p> <p>A person aged 15 years or over usually living with another person aged 15 years or over in a registered marriage or consensual union.</p>

## Ethnic Group

Name	Description
Ethnic Group	<p><b>Ethnicity</b></p> <p>Records people's ethnicities grouped into level 1 groupings as European, Māori, Pacific, Asian, Other, Not stated. Ethnicity is counted on a 'total response' basis and people may belong to more than one grouping and are counted in each relevant category. Measures by ethnicity in the 2013 PES are not comparable with other measures because ethnicity is not imputed for census substitute records. For further information, see methodology and data quality information.</p> <p>PES rates by ethnicity are based on the responses provided in PES</p>
Ethnic Group	<p><b>European Ethnic Group</b></p> <p>Counts people identifying with one or more ethnicity within the level 1 grouping of ethnicities labelled European Ethnic Group in the classification, whether or not they also identify ethnicities in other groupings. People who identify with more than one ethnicity in the European Ethnic Group are counted once in that group, but are also counted in all other relevant groups.</p>
Ethnic Group	<p><b>Māori Ethnic Group</b></p> <p>Counts people identifying with Māori ethnicity, whether or not they also identify other ethnicities. People who identify with other ethnicities but are also counted in all other relevant groups.</p>

Ethnic Group	<p><b>Pacific Ethnic Group</b> Counts people identifying with one or more ethnicity within the level 1 grouping of ethnicities labelled Pacific (or Pacific Peoples) Ethnic Group in the classification, whether or not they also identify ethnicities in other groupings. People who identify with more than one ethnicity in the Pacific Ethnic Group are counted once in that group, but are also counted in all other relevant groups.</p>
Ethnic Group	<p><b>Asian Ethnic Group</b> Counts people identifying with one or more ethnicity within the level 1 grouping of ethnicities labelled Asian Ethnic Group in the classification, whether or not they also identify ethnicities in other groupings. People who identify with more than one ethnicity in the Asian Ethnic Group are counted once in that group, but are also counted in all other relevant groups.</p>
Ethnic Group	<p><b>Other ethnicity</b> Counts people identifying with one or more ethnicity within the level 1 groupings of ethnicities labelled Middle Eastern, Latin American, African (=MELAA) Ethnic Group and/or the Other Ethnic Group in the classification, whether or not they also identify ethnicities in other groupings. People who identify with more than one ethnicity MELAA or Other Ethnic Groups are counted once in the 'other ethnicity' group, but are also counted in all other relevant groups if they have additional relevant ethnicities. The vast majority of people in this category in PES are people who gave 'New Zealander' as an ethnic response.</p>

## Civil Union

Name	Description
Civil Union (registered)	<p><b>Civil Union (registered)</b> The act, ceremony or process by which the legal relationship of two people is constituted. A civil union may be entered into by couples of the same sex or by couples of different sexes. In New Zealand, a civil union may be solemnised either by a civil union celebrant or before a registrar of civil unions. A licence must be obtained from a registrar before a civil union can be solemnised, and notice must be given by one of the parties to a registrar.</p>
Same-sex Partners	<p><b>Same-sex Partners</b> Two people of the same sex who are in a consensual union.</p>