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**News**

**Infant mortality in South Africa 'unacceptably high'**

May 14, 2010 *Edition 1*

**Sipokazi Maposa**

A NEW study on child health has raised a red flag on the level of maternal and antenatal health care provided in South Africa's public health institutions.

The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) study, titled "The Health of our children in SA: Results from a national HIV prevalence survey", shows that while the majority of pregnant women (97 percent) had access to antenatal care during their pregnancy, infant mortality remained high with about 2 500 children dying in the country every year. The study sampled about 9 000 children.

Despite the good access to health care, the study suggested that services at clinics and hospitals were insufficient to save lives.

Apart from HIV/Aids, which claimed most of the children's lives, other deaths were the result of hypertension, obstetric haemorrhage, pregnancy-related deaths, sepsis and pre-existing maternal disease.

Presenting the study in a teleconference yesterday, Dr Olive Shisana, the HSRC's chief executive, said the "massive problems" related to the quality of health care at hospitals and clinics remained a major concern.

Some of the incidents reported between September 2007 and March 2008 revealed serious inadequacies in health care, including the fact that guidelines were not being followed.

The study found further there was high use of public primary health-care services for children in the country. This did not always result in essential services being accessed by those most in need of them.

Researchers also expressed concern about feeding practices in the country, reporting that while exclusive breast-feeding in the first six months of life had been proven a good method that increased infant survival rates, mixed feeding seemed more popular.

At least 51.3 percent of the babies in the study were mixed-fed, a quarter exclusively breast-fed, and about 22.5 percent were exclusively formula-fed.

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