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Monthly Tracking of Infant Mortality in Portugal: Post-COVID Trends

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Background: The Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) is a fundamental health indicator that reflects the overall well-being of populations. Recognizing the need for more timely data to inform public health strategies, the authors have presented a novel method for monitoring IMR monthly instead of traditional annual reporting. Our work aims to increase further the robustness of a novel method for monitoring IMR monthly.

Methods: This new approach leverages the Portuguese E-Death Certification System (SICO) and Statistics Portugal (2016-2024) data. It provides the most recent insights into IMR trends in Portugal, highlighting the post-pandemic period. This method allows for the analysis of cumulative deaths under one year of age against live births over the previous 12 months, offering a more responsive metric to guide interventions.

Results: The updated analysis reveals a continued pattern influenced by the dynamic public health landscape of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the phasing out of restrictions and the end of mandatory mask usage. The pandemic has significantly impacted IMR trends, with Portugal experiencing a decline in IMR during the stringent phases, reaching historically low levels. This trend slightly reversed following the lifting of restrictions, underscoring the urgent need for understanding the complex interplay between public health policies and infant mortality. In the post-pandemic period, the IMR increased until October 2023, showing a later (up to February 2024) global decreasing trend within the range of 2.5 and 2.9 deaths per 1000 live births.

Conclusions: Recent updates confirm the effectiveness of real-time IMR monitoring as a vital tool for policymakers and health professionals. Portugal's experience underscores the importance of real-time health indicators in managing public health crises. It stresses the need for further research to understand factors affecting IMR and to continue reducing infant mortality.

Key messages:

- COVID-19 restrictions correlated with a historical low in Portugal's IMR, showcasing the impact of stringent public health measures.
- Post-lockdown, the rise in IMR after the phasing out COVID-19 restrictions and later stabilization underscores the challenges and the necessity for dynamic health policies.