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Babies with low birth weight may die earlier: study

Babies born with a low birth weight are at an increased risk of death from infancy to adolescence compared with babies born at a normal birth weight, suggests new research led by an Indian-origin scientist

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Babies born with a low birth weight are at an increased risk of death in infancy till adolescence compared to babies born at a normal birthweight, suggests new research led by an Indian-origin scientist.

The findings showed that death rates were higher in babies with low birth weight at both age groups.

Also, death occurred 130 times more frequently in those born at a very low birth weight (under 2,500g) than normal birth weight in infancy.

“This study is significant as it shows, for the first time, that low birth weight is associated with increased death rates from infancy right through to adolescence,” said lead researcher Sailesh Kotecha, professor at Cardiff University in Britain.

In the research, published in the journal PLOS Medicine, the team examined official death rates in very low birth weight and low birth weight babies among over 12 million births in England and Wales.

Of the 12,355,251 live births between 1993 and 2011, there were 74,890 (0.61 per cent) deaths between birth and 18 years of age, with 57,623 (77 per cent) occurring in the first year of life and 17,267 (23 per cent) occurring between one and 18 years of age.

According to researchers, perinatal events and congenital malformations were the common causes of death in infancy.

Further, conditions of the nervous system (20 per cent) and respiratory system (16 per cent) were found as the leading causes of death in the very low birth weight group.

However, cancers and external conditions (including accidents) were seen as the primary causes of death in low birth weight groups.

“The study reaffirms the need to tackle important factors such as maternal smoking and deprivation which are well known to contribute to low birth weight,” Kotecha added.

“By understanding and ameliorating the influences of upstream exposures such maternal smoking and deprivation, later mortality can be decreased by reducing the delivery of vulnerable infants with low birth weight,” the researchers concluded.