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**Title:**

**Diarrhoea. Marasmus. Convulsions.: Infant Mortality in Nineteenth-Century Tasmania**

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**Abstract:**

This study investigates the levels and causes of infant mortality in nineteenth-century Tasmania using a unique computerised database containing all civil birth and death registration records for Tasmania from 1838 to 1899. The individual-level records contained in the database allow the computation of cause-specific infant mortality rates, as well as rates by age at death (in days) and month of death.

The study found that high infant mortality in Tasmania over the late 1840s and early 1850s resulted from a series of severe epidemics and the extremely high fatality rate of babies in the convict nurseries. Infant mortality fell precipitously through the 1850s and, from 1860 to the end of the century, averaged around 90–110 deaths per 1,000 births. Even though the composition of registered causes of infant death changed markedly over this time, evidence suggests that this resulted more from shifts in nosological fashion than changes in the actual causes of infant death; the trend in infant mortality was flat over this period, and the seasonal pattern of infant mortality was the same in 1895–99 as it had been in 1860–64. Infant mortality remained stable in late nineteenth-century Tasmania while mortality was falling at most other ages because of the high incidence of diarrhoeal disease. Examination of deaths by month of death indicate that many infant deaths registered from causes such as ‘Convulsions’, ‘Debility and marasmus’ and ‘Teething’ were probably due to diarrhoeal disease.