



Child Health Care in Israel

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Israel is a relatively rapidly growing country with a high fertility rate and a young population. These data emphasize the importance of an efficient and appropriate pediatric service for its population. Although the pediatric service in Israel has attained several achievements, such as a relatively low infant mortality, high vaccination rates, and a primary care service that is mainly based on licensed pediatricians, several challenges, such as overcoming inequalities in health care and health indices between different regions and different populations within the country and the provision of a more organized mental and dental health care service to children, need to be addressed. (*J Pediatr* 2016;177S:S107-15).

The State of Israel was established in 1948. It is located in the southeastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. Considering its small size, the geography of the country is diverse and includes the hilly north, the coastal plain, and the Negev desert in the south. Natural water sources are scarce, and the country increasingly relies on desalination, which now supplies about 30% of the drinking water and is planned to supply 50% by the beginning of 2016. The majority of the population lives on the narrow strip of land constituting the coastal plain, and over 90% of the population is urban. Population density is among the highest in the Western world with 358.8 people per km².

Sociodemographic Structure

In the 67 years since the establishment of the state, the population increased from 806 000 to 8.3 million in 2015. This population growth has resulted from a natural increase and waves of immigration. The country's population typically has a rapid growth rate, a relatively high fertility rate, and a young population of which, in 2014, 28.2% was less than 14 years of age and only 10.2% were older than 64 years. Although the population growth rate has decreased from a high of 3.5 between 1990 and 1995, and was 1.9 in 2013, it is still much higher than all European countries and 3 times higher than the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) average of around 0.6% (Table I).¹

Seventy-five percent of the population is Jewish and 21% is Arab. Even through the overall general fertility rate is slowly rising and was 3.05 in 2013, it reflects a slow rise in the fertility rate of the Jewish population, which is offset by a 25% decline in the general fertility of the Muslim Arab population from 4.7 to 3.35 over the last 13 years. There is an increasing trend to delay childbearing, and presently, the median age at first birth is 27.2 years, up from 25.5 years in 1990. The average family size is 3.71, and an estimated 8.3% of children live in single parent households. The annual birth cohort in 2014 was 176 600 births (Table I).¹

Economy

Throughout its history, armed conflicts with neighboring Arab countries and large-scale immigration have posed heavy burdens on the Israeli economy, thus creating the need for loans and extensive foreign support. Despite these challenges, Israel is a developed, industrialized country that has a growing economy. Its gross domestic product (GDP) per capita grew more than tenfold since 1950 and in 2014 was US \$33 300. With a GDP of US \$243.93 billion (Table II), Israel was accepted into the OECD in 2010. Despite its growing economy, Israel has the highest rate of child poverty among OECD countries with a child poverty rate of 31% in 2014, up from 12.8% in the 1990s.² This can be attributed to cuts in the funds for a social safety net for the entire country as well as declining governmental child support payments. Income inequality in Israel is also among the top 5 countries in the OECD.¹

ED	Emergency department
HMO	Health Maintenance Organization
MoH	Ministry of Health
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PICU	Pediatric intensive care unit

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Table I. Sociodemography

	1949 (or later date)	1990	1995	2000	2005	2012 (or latest available data)
Total population (thousands)	1174 (1949)	4821.7	5619	6369.3	6990.7	8345 (2015)
Population 0-14 y (thousands)	630.3 (1955)	1493.7	1648.4	1817.2	1964.1	2293 (2014)
Population 15-24 y (thousands)	274.9 (1955)	844.2	993.3	1089.4	1129.7	1211.9
Population over 65 y (thousands)	85.2 (1955)	442.2	554.5	622.8	687.5	832.9
Annual population growth rate (%)	3.2 (1961-1971)	3.09	2.67	2.64	1.76	1.86 (2013)
Population density (people per km ²)	43.1 (1948)	215.34	256.24	290.62	320.24	372.43 (2013)
Average family size	4.20 (1970)	4.12	4.04	3.91	3.82	3.72 (2013)
Mean age of woman at first childbirth	n/a	25.5	25.2	25.7	26.7	27.3 (2012)
Fertility rate	3.93 (1955)	2.82	2.9	2.95	2.84	3.05 (2013)
Birth rate (per 1000 people)	23.8 (1967)	22.2	21.1	21.7	20.8	21.6
Death rate (per 1000 people)	6.4 (1967)	6.8	6.3	6.0	5.6	5.3
Distribution of population (rural/urban) thousands	489.4/1624.5 (1960)	449.2/4210.7	506.4/5038.5	553.2/5735.7	587.8/6342.2	637.2/7273.2
Age dependency ratios (population 0-14 y:15-64 y)	69.85 (1960)	67.07	63.23	61.46	61.00	62.5
(population 0-14+ y > 65 y:15-64 y)%	n/a	n/a	9.3	11.4	13	13 (2013)
Proportion of single parent households (%)	n/a	n/a	9.3	11.4	13	13 (2013)

n/a, not available.

Political Context

Israel is a parliamentary democracy in which numerous political parties vie for representation in elections every 4 years. Because no one party has a majority representation in the 120-member Knesset (parliament), Israel has a coalition government. From 2001 to 2013, the average value of the corruption perceptions index was 63.62 points, with a maximum of 76 points in 2001 and a minimum of 58 points in 2011. (The index value ranges from 0 to 100; 100 is the ideal score.)

Israel is an active member in several major international organizations, including the United Nations and the World Health Organization (European Region). It is a signatory to many significant international agreements, including the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Governmental Structures

The Ministry of Health (MoH) has overall responsibility for the health of the population and the efficiency of the health

care system. The defining characteristic of the health care system in Israel is its governance by the National Health Insurance Law (1995), which provides health care to all residents through 4 health funds (Health Maintenance Organizations [HMOs]). There are no constraints as to which health care fund one joins, and a free transfer from fund to fund is allowed quarterly. The law includes a standardized “basket” of medical services with a detailed list of essential technologies, medicines, and therapies. Residents pay a progressive health tax, administered by the National Insurance Institute, Israel’s social security organization, which transfers funding to the HMOs according to a certain formula based on the number of members in each fund, the age distribution of members, and a number of other indicators. The HMOs also receive direct financing from the state. The basket of services is updated annually. The annual increase in funding is not a mandated constant sum but is instead decided upon yearly by the government. The decision as to which medicines and therapies are added to the basket of services is adjudicated by a public committee, which includes health professionals, public representatives, religious leaders, and others. In the past, immunizations

Table II. Economic indicators

	Start point earlier if relevant	1990	1995	2000	2005	Latest available year
GDP (US \$ in billions)	27.1 (1980)	59.2	91.2	128.3	159.7	268.3 (2014)
GDP per capita (US \$ in thousands)	7.2 (1980)	13.2	17.1	21.3	24.2	33.3 (2014)
Public expenditure (% GDP)	n/a	55.9	51.3	48.4	46.5	43.0 (2014)
Health expenditure, total (% of GDP)	5.4 (1962)	7.3	7.4	7.4	7.7	7.5 (2012)
Unemployment (thousands and % of total labor force)	44.5	157.8	132.5	213.8	246.4	228.3
Youth (15-24 y) unemployment rate (total labor force ages 15-24 y unemployed during a specified y)	4.5% (1969)	9.6%	6.3%	8.8%	9%	6.2% (2013)
Poverty rate total (the proportion of people whose household income is less than 50% of the median disposable household income, adjusted for household size)	13.3 (1980)	22.1	14.9	17	17.8	12.1
Child poverty rate (proportion of children who have an equivalized family income below 50% of the median family income of the total population)	15.8 (1980)	14.3	16.8	17.5	20.6	19.4 (2012)
Inequality measure (Gini coefficient)	8.1 (1980)	12.8 (1989)	23.2	25.2	35.2	30.8 (2015)
	0.434 (1980)	0.48	0.497	0.517	0.523	0.505 (2012)

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