

HOW DOES THE GEOGRAPHY OF HEALTH INFLUENCE POPULATION DYNAMICS?

The condition of a country's population requires much more than simply knowing the total population or the growth rate. Also of significance is the welfare of the country's people across regions, ethnicities, or social classes. Among the most important influences on population dynamics are geographical differences in sanitation, the prevalence of diseases, and the availability of health care.

Infant Mortality

One of the leading measures of the condition of a country's population is the **infant mortality rate (IMR)**. Infant mortality is recorded as a baby's death during the first year following its birth (unlike child mortality, which records death between ages 1 and 5). Infant mortality is normally given as the number of cases per thousand, that is, per thousand live births.

Infant and child mortality reflect the overall health of a society. High infant mortality has a variety of causes,

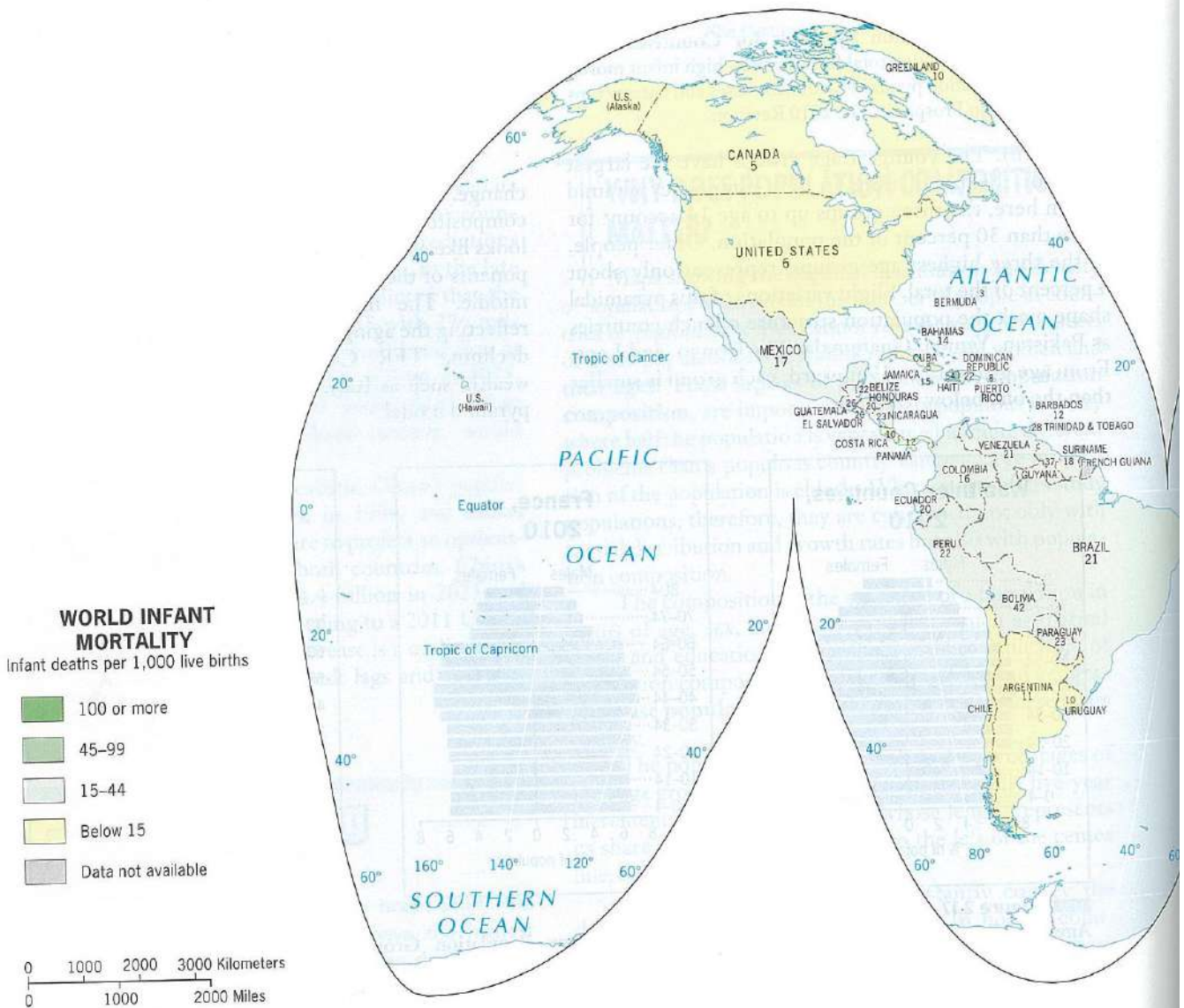


Figure 2.18 Infant Mortality Rate, 2011. Data from: CIA World Fact book, 2011 estimate.

the physical health of the mother being a key factor. In societies where most women bear a large number of babies, the women also tend to be inadequately nourished, exhausted from overwork, suffering from disease, and poorly educated. Often, infants die because they are improperly weaned. Demographers report that many children die because their parents do not know how to cope with the routine childhood problem of diarrhea. This condition, together with malnutrition, is the leading killer of children throughout the world. Poor sanitation is yet another threat to infants and children. Estimates are that more than one-fifth of the world's population lacks

ready access to clean drinking water or hygienic human waste-disposal facilities.

The map showing the world distribution of infant mortality (Fig. 2.18) reveals high rates in many poorer countries. The map shows infant mortality patterns at five levels ranging from 100 or more per thousand (one death for every eight live births) to fewer than 15. Compare this map to that of overall crude death rate (CDR) in Figure 2.14, and the role of infant mortality in societies with high death rates is evident.

The lowest infant mortality rate among larger populations has long been reported by Japan, with 3.0 deaths per 1000 live births in a country of over 127 million people.

