

# European Surveillance of Congenital Anomalies

## EUROCAT's role in Public Health

- A network of population-based registries for the epidemiologic surveillance of congenital anomalies
  - Co-ordination and database funded by the **European Commission Public Health Programme**
  - **WHO Collaborating Centre for the Epidemiologic Surveillance of Congenital Anomalies**
- Started in 1979, it has expanded to 20 countries, and currently covers over 25% of births in the European Union.
- A resource for all stakeholders and policy makers: web access to EUROCAT **prevalence** data on 95 types of congenital anomaly among livebirths, stillbirths and terminations of pregnancy following prenatal diagnosis, updated twice a year, at <http://www.eurocat.ulster.ac.uk/pubdata/tables.html>
- A database for surveillance and research **unique** worldwide in its combination of size (400,000 anonymised cases), detail and data quality

- A forum for the pooling of data, expertise and resources, for the exploitation of diversity to gain understanding, for facilitating expansion to new member states and areas, and for jointly highlighting the need to raise the prominence of congenital anomalies in the **public health agenda**.

## Causes and Prevention of Congenital Anomalies

There has been no decline in the overall prevalence of congenital anomalies in recent decades. With political will, both to implement current knowledge on prevention and fund further research, that situation can change. Consult <http://www.eurocat.ulster.ac.uk/pubdata/publications.html> for EUROCAT publications concerning:

- the failure of policies to promote periconceptional **folic acid** supplementation in preventing **spina bifida** and other **neural tube defects** on a large scale
- **postmarketing drug surveillance** comparing the risks associated with maternal use of different antiepileptic drugs
- the proceedings of a recent symposium in Budapest on

**environmental pollution** and congenital anomalies, and the detection and investigation of **clusters**

- the rise in prevalence of **Down's Syndrome** associated with increasing maternal age across Europe
- the continuing high numbers of children born with **congenital heart disease**
- the substantial contribution of congenital anomalies to perinatal and **infant mortality**

## Prenatal Screening and Diagnosis

**Prenatal diagnosis** can help prepare for birth and surgical treatment, or for certain anomalies can lead to a choice as to whether to terminate the pregnancy. Consult <http://www.eurocat.ulster.ac.uk/pubdata/publications.html> for EUROCAT publications, and "PD" tables at <http://www.eurocat.ulster.ac.uk/pubdata/tables.html> concerning the wide variation in Europe in policies regarding prenatal screening, and laws and practices regarding **termination of pregnancy** for fetal anomaly, as well as recent figures concerning prenatal detection rates, termination rates, and livebirth rates.

## Contact Us

Please contact us with questions or comments, or to **subscribe to a newsletter** twice a year, at [eurocat@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:eurocat@ulster.ac.uk)