

MALAYSIAN ETHNICITY AND BACKGROUND

People who have migrated to Australia from Malaysia may have Chinese, Indian or Malay backgrounds. The information here refers mainly to the Malay population. For information about those with Indian or Chinese backgrounds, see those profiles.

Malays first came to Australia – mostly from islands in Indonesia – to work in the pearling industry in the 19th Century. Many Aboriginal families in northwest Australia have some Malay ancestry. Overseas students, mostly Malay from Peninsular Malaysia, came to Australia under the Colombo Plan in the 1950s. Some married in Australia, and later sponsored parents or siblings. From the late 1960s, following political tension, many Chinese and Indian people from Malaysia have settled in Australia.

Communication

- In Malay culture, social interaction is concerned with the maintenance of harmonious relations between individuals. Unobtrusive communication is the ideal sort of social interaction. Subscription to this style of communication is desired to avoid the discomfort associated with shame.
- Some Malay women may not wish to shake hands with men.
- In general, women prefer to be examined by female doctors, and women who adhere strictly to Islamic precepts may find antenatal or midwifery care by men especially difficult.

Health related beliefs and practices

Malays, Chinese and Indians in Malaysia share beliefs based on humoral medical theory. Illnesses, body states, foods and medicines are regarded as 'hot' or 'cold' depending on the effect on the body. Chinese and Indian women from other countries observe similar customs.

40 days. During this time they do not leave the house and may stay by a heater and dress warmly.

Pregnancy

- Traditionally, women were cared for by village midwives, but antenatal care and hospital birth have been common practices for many decades.
- Malays regard pregnancy and birth as a normal process in a woman's life.
- During pregnancy, women may see a midwife for massage.
- A ceremony may be held in the seventh month of pregnancy to ensure the mother's safety and the safe arrival of the infant.

- Pregnancy is a hot state, and women should avoid overheating. Cold foods are usually preferred. After giving birth, women are said to be cold, and drink warm drinks and eat hot foods.
- Women may observe a period of confinement of 30-

Population in Australia:
92,320 people

Population in
Queensland: 9,610
people

Population in Brisbane:
6,688 people

Gender ratio: 83.6
males per 100 females

Median age: 39.5 years

AGE	%
0-14	4.3
15-24	20.8
25-44	34.0
45-64	33.4
≥ 65	7.4

People may be from
Chinese, Malay or
Indian background

Depending on their
background, people will
speak English, Malay,
Cantonese, another
Chinese dialect or
language, Hindi, or
Tamil.

Almost all people born
in Malaysia (92%) are
proficient in English,
regardless of the
language spoken at
home.

The main religions are
Islam, Christianity,
Hinduism and
Buddhism.

The Indian, Malay and
Chinese communities
are well established.

Birth

- Malay women are usually familiar with biomedical health services.
- They may prefer female practitioners and usually place a high importance on maintaining their modesty. During childbirth they may like to be protected by curtains or screens.
- Malay women are encouraged to pray during labour and avoid crying and screaming.

After birth

- Postpartum restrictions and rites for Malay women usually reflect humoral medical theory. Many practices are designed to restore heat thought to be depleted by the birth process. In Australia, hot water bottles, staying close to heaters and dressing warmly are used to restore heat. During the postpartum period (30-40 days), the woman's abdomen may be bound. The diet is restricted to hot foods, omitting such items as fruits, vegetables and cold drinks.
- To warm the body, postpartum women may be given a special drink *jamu* (herbs), made with turmeric. This practice is based on a belief that *jamu* may relieve cramps and prevent rheumatism.
- Postpartum women are given up to 10 sessions of gentle massage.
- It is important for the health provider to discuss what will happen with the placenta with the woman prior to delivery. Malay women may wish the placenta to be treated like a body that once had a life. They may wish it to be wrapped in a white cloth and buried.

Infant care

- If parents are Muslim, the father of the newborn may whisper the *azan* into the infant's right ear and the *iqamat* into the left ear (prayers).
- Also according to Islam, a chewed date, honey or something sweet may be rubbed into an infant's palate. In Australia, this practice is prohibited due to potential risk of bacterial infection and increasing level of blood sugar.
- According to Islamic tradition, boys may be circumcised at any time from seven days. In Malaysia, boys are usually circumcised when they are around seven or eight years old.
- According to Islamic tradition, between seven and 40 days after birth, the head of the newborn should be shaved.

Infant feeding

- Colostrum is usually expressed before the initiation of breastfeeding. Malay women need to be informed of the importance of colostrum feeding and encouraged to feed their infants.
- During the first one or two days, until the colostrum has been expressed, some liquid, such as a paste of cornflour and water, may be given to the infant.
- Supplementary foods, including thinned cow milk or formula, or thin rice water, are usually given during the first month. Health workers should consider discussing the benefits of prolonged breastfeeding.
- Bottle feeding was introduced in colonial Malaya in the 19th Century and many women, especially from Chinese backgrounds, will have been formula fed.
- Of the 141 Malaysia-born women who delivered in Queensland Health facilities in 2006, at the time of discharge, 74% (104) exclusively breastfed, 18% (26) breastfed and formula fed and 8% (16) exclusively formula fed.

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