

## PAPUA NEW GUINEA ETHNICITY AND BACKGROUND

Papua New Guinea is one of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse countries on earth. There are more than 850 indigenous languages and traditional societies. The information in this section should be read with this in mind.

### Communication

- In Melanesian culture, women may not be allowed to communicate with people of the opposite gender. Therefore, most women will prefer health practitioners of the same gender.
- Many Pacific Islander cultures place less emphasis on keeping time and punctuality and may require a reminder call prior to appointments.

### Health related beliefs and practices

Since the introduction of Christianity, traditional healing through ancestors and spirits has often been replaced by church healing prayers and group gatherings to pray for health. Some people may believe in the power of spirits, sorcery and black magic as causes of illness and death.

### Pregnancy

*Domestic violence in Papua New Guinea is very common. Health professionals should discuss this issue with pregnant women and refer them to the relevant services if appropriate.*

- People from some regions of Papua New Guinea may link malformations to maternal attempts to abort the pregnancy.
- Among some groups, pregnancy and birth are compared to women's other productive roles, such as planting crops and raising pigs.
- Twins are often regarded with concern, the result, according to some beliefs, of sexual intercourse during pregnancy.

### After birth

*According to commonly found cultural norms in Papua New Guinea, postpartum women must remain abstinent until weaning. In some communities, this may be for up to five years.*

- Women from some tribes may become disoriented after birth. This disorientation is a culturally influenced state by which labouring women are able to express the severity of pain.
- There is a strong belief that a woman may die if the umbilical cord is cut before the delivery of the placenta. Some women may wish to take the placenta with them, or to take a section of the umbilical cord.

### Infant feeding

- Breastfeeding is widespread across the country and in Australia. Of the 337 Papua New Guinea-born women who delivered in Queensland Health

Population in Australia:  
24,020

Population in Queensland:  
12,590 people

Population in Brisbane:  
6,702 people

Gender ratio: 80.1 males  
per 100 females

The median age is 37.8  
years and more than half  
are between 25 and 44  
years.

Age	%
0-14	6.5
15-24	9.5
25-44	53.9
45-64	24.4
≥ 65	5.9

People may identify as Australian, Papua New Guinean, or English, or by any of the many tribal groups of the country.

The main languages are PNG English, Pidjin, or among those of Chinese background, Cantonese. Regardless of language spoken at home, the majority speak English.

Most people are Christian (primarily Catholic or Anglican), or have no specific religion.

Most people in Australia who were born in PNG are the children of Australians who were working there when Australia was responsible for administering either the Australian territory of Papua or the Territory of Papua and New Guinea.

facilities in 2006, at the time of discharge, 91% (306) exclusively breastfed, 2% (9) breastfed and formula fed and 7% (22) exclusively formula fed.

- Some women express colostrum, believing that it is 'dirty' milk, but other women conventionally feed colostrum to their infant. Expressing colostrum is more common among women from the highland regions than among those from coastal regions. Health professionals should discuss the benefits of colostrum feeding.
- Breast massage and traditional medicines may be used to increase milk production.
- The breast is given whenever the infant cries, and an infant's cry is considered as an indicator of hunger.
- Infants may be withdrawn from the breast and given supplementary foods and cleansing enemas during sickness. These practices should be discussed and women should be advised about the importance of breastfeeding when infants are sick.
- Solids are generally introduced from the age of four months. Some mothers may introduce solids earlier.
- Breastfeeding usually continues up to two years of age despite the introduction of solids.
- In Papua New Guinea, bottle feeding is uncommon and used predominantly by working mothers. In Australia, working mothers from Papua New Guinea may replace breastfeeding with bottle feeding. Additional information about the continuation of breastfeeding while working should be provided.

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