Measuring Health Status

Summary questions
1. What is epidemiology?
2. What are the more common measures of epidemiology?
3. What is mortality?
4. What are the leading causes of death in Australia?
5. What is infant mortality?
6. What is morbidity?
7. What is life expectancy?
8. Outline reasons for the increase in life expectancy from the 1800s to now.
9. What are some reasons for the difference in life expectancy between males and females. Suggest why this gap is decreasing.

Summary of responses
1. Epidemiology refers to the study of health and disease in a population and its sub-groups over a period of time.
2. Commonly used statistics in epidemiology are: birth rates, mortality (death) rates, life expectancy, frequency and type of health care services used, incidence of disease and prevalence of disease.
3. The number of deaths for a given cause in a given population, over a set time-period.
4. Cardiovascular diseases, various cancers.
5. The number of deaths in the first year of life per 1000 live births.
6. The rates, distribution and trends of illness, disease and injury in a given population.
7. An estimate of the number of years a person can expect to live at any particular age.
8. There are factors that contribute to improvements in life expectancy, including:
   - improvements in medical knowledge and treatment technologies
   - reduced smoking rates
   - improvements in hygiene and sanitation
   - improved working conditions and better health education.
9. In the past, males have engaged in more risky behaviours and jobs as well as higher rates of smoking. Smoking rates are decreasing more quickly for men than for women, and with equal opportunity many women are now doing similar jobs to males. Education has also seen males access medical assistance more.
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<td>1 What can epidemiology tell us?</td>
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<td>3 Does epidemiology measure everything about health status?</td>
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<td>4 How do we use epidemiology to improve the health status of Australians?</td>
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<td>5 What are the current trends in life expectancy?</td>
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<td>6 What are the current leading causes of death for:</td>
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<td>• females?</td>
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Summary of responses

1 Epidemiology provides vital information for governments and health organisations by showing the patterns of health and disease, as well as the use of health services among the population within which they operate. Epidemiology is able to show trends in the prevalence (number of cases of disease in a population at a specific time) and incidence (number of new cases of disease in a population), as well as provide insight into the apparent causes/determinants of disease.

2 Public health researchers, governments, health organisations, manufacturers of health products and professionals.

3 It cannot provide an accurate representation of the inequalities in health status between population sub-groups, reasons as to why these inequalities exist, the impact a disease or injury can have on the equality of life and the impact that socio-cultural, environmental, socio-economic and individual determinants have on health.

4 The identification of specific health trends is then used to establish health priorities, and to guide the decision-making, resource allocation and programs of all public and private sectors involved in health care and health promotion in Australia.

5 It is increasing for both males (79) and females (84).