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COVID-19 Lockdown Contributes To Infant Mortality Cluster In Australia

By **Cullen Paradis**

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KEY POINTS

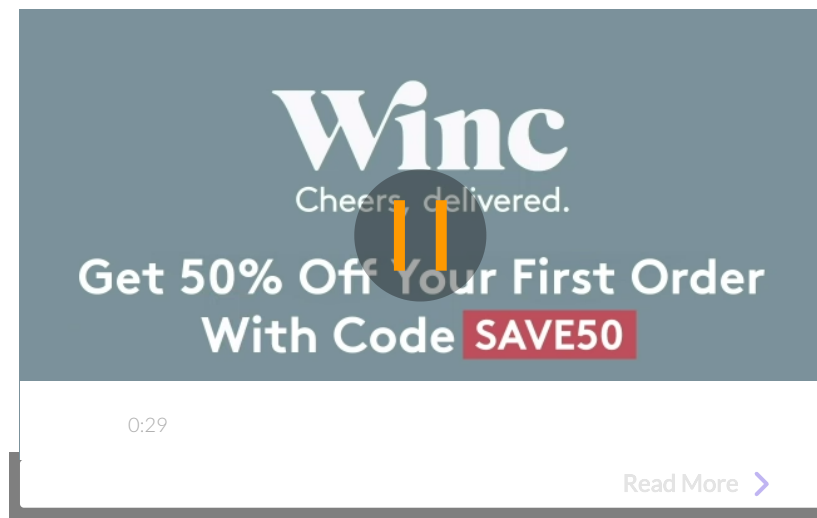
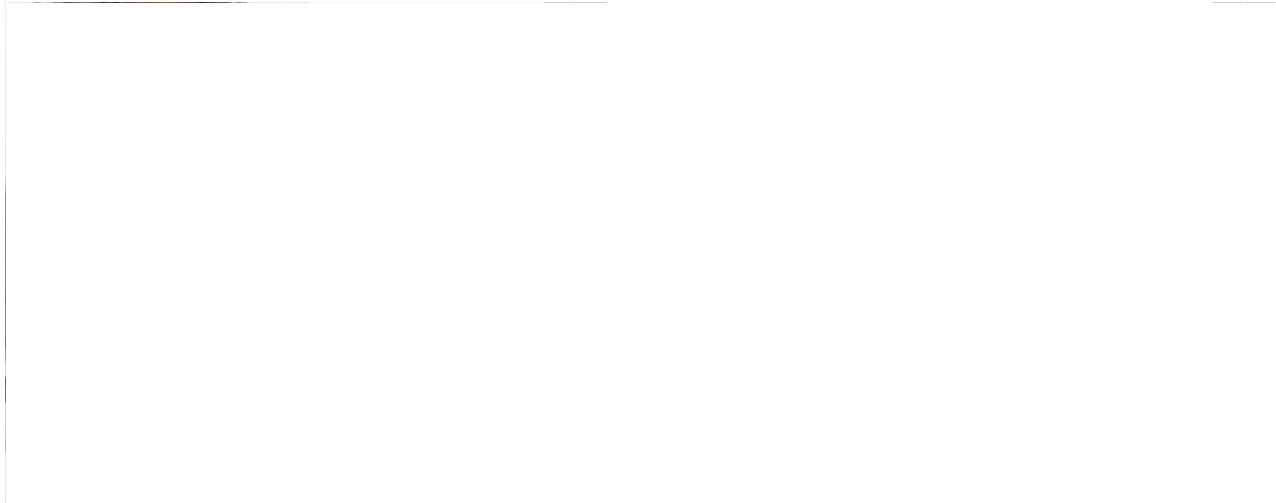
- Four infants have died in four weeks in Adelaide's central hospital due to COVID-19 lockdowns
- The hospital lacks a heart machine for children
- The issue was already under investigation when the fourth infant died Friday

The city of Adelaide in South Australia has seen four newborn deaths in four weeks due to COVID-19 lockdowns preventing transport to better-equipped hospitals in Victoria.

Officials in Victoria say Adelaide lockdowns prevented them from initiating medical transport. Adelaide's hospitals are chronically underfunded and lack both the personnel and equipment to deal with these difficult cases.

The hospital was already under investigation for the third infant death when the fourth fatality occurred on Friday. Obstetrician, gynecologist and professor John Svigos [testified on Oct. 13](#) that Adelaide's

hospital is the only one in a mainland capital city that does not have heart machines for children and infants.



Dr. Mike Cusack, South Australia’s chief medical officer, said that between six and 10 babies with heart deformities are born each year in South Australia. Typically they are airlifted to hospitals with better facilities, but COVID-19 lockdowns have complicated that process.

Victoria officials have said that they would be willing to perform standard pick-up procedures, but were unable to due to Melbourne’s lockdown. Svigos [confirmed](#) that during his testimony.

“In our current COVID situation... the usual process of referral to the Melbourne cardiac unit is no longer tenable, and referral to Sydney is on a case-by-case basis,” he said.

Beyond the cluster of infant deaths, Adelaide’s hospital is struggling to meet the needs of its community with a tight budget and overworked staff. Bernadette Mulholland, chief industrial officer of the Slaried Medical Officers Association, told the inquiry committee that a lack of resources often led to junior doctors “sleeping on the floor.”

“Essentially there is not enough staff, not enough resourcing, not enough allied health to run many of the services of pediatric medicine in this state,” she said.