

Timeline of changes in live birth registration in Ontario

Temporal Changes in Data Collection

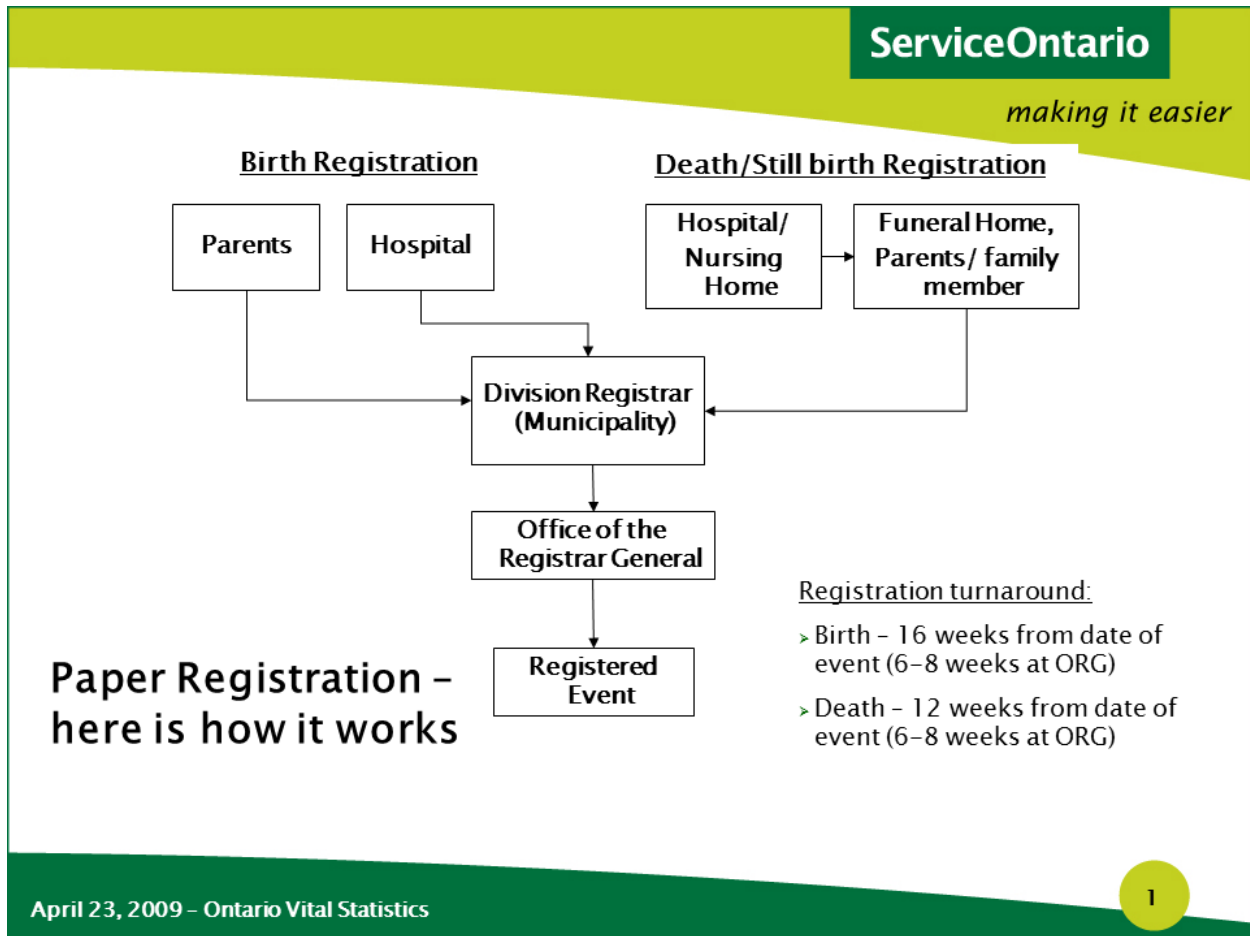
A **live birth registration** contains information about a newborn and is used to create his or her permanent identity record. A “**complete**” birth registration consists of information originating from two forms – the **Notice of Live Birth or Stillbirth (Form 1)** completed by the birth attendant within two business days of the birth, and a **Statement of Live Birth (Form 2)** completed by the parents/informant within 30 days of the birth. If ServiceOntario only receives Form 1 or does not receive Form 2 before a certain closing date, the registration is considered “**incomplete**” and the birth is not included in the electronic file of data submitted for official live birth statistical purposes.

Significant changes have recently been made in the processes used for data collection of live births in Ontario. Prior to March 2006, all registrations in the province were paper-based. Between **March 2006 and July 2009**, an electronic newborn registration system was phased in across the province,¹ accompanied by elimination of the fees charged for birth registration. The paper and electronic registration processes are described below.

Paper registration process

In the paper registration process, Forms 1 and 2 were sent to the division registrar in each municipality. The division registrar ensured the completeness of the information on both forms and then forwarded them to the Office of the Registrar General in Thunder Bay. A pictorial of the paper registration process is provided in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Paper registration process

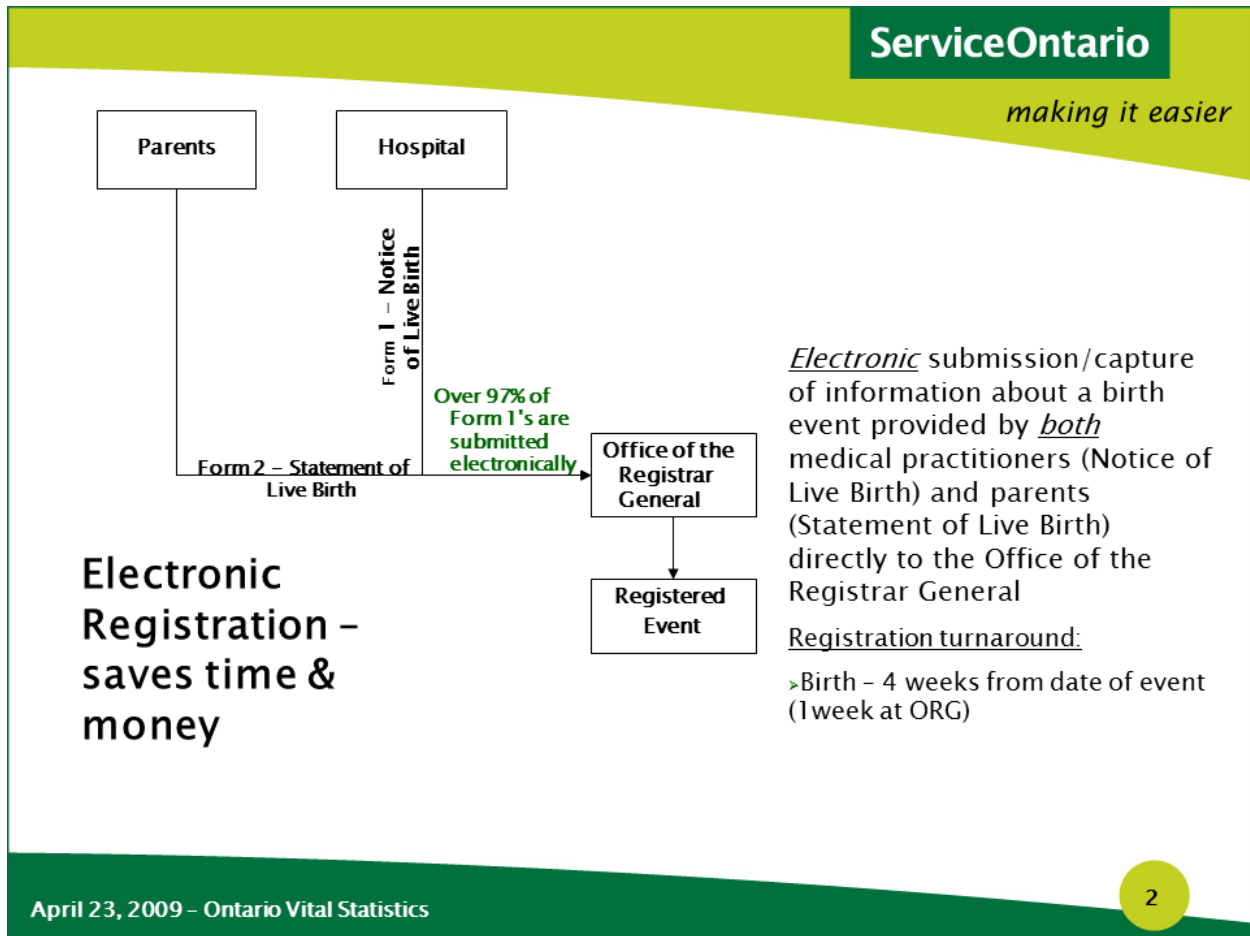


Electronic registration process

The electronic newborn registration service was implemented in two phases. Phase 1, which began in March 2006,² consisted of integrating three services into one application, to prevent parents from having to enter the same information multiple times for separate application forms.¹ This included an online birth registration form (which had to be completed, printed and submitted to the municipality), as well as online application forms for a birth certificate and Social Insurance Number, which were submitted directly to the Office of the Registrar General online, but were not processed until the birth registration form was received from the municipality.¹

The second phase of this project introduced a fully electronic service enabling hospitals and parents to electronically submit the birth registration information traditionally collected by **Form 1** and **Form 2**, respectively, **directly** to the Ontario Office of the Registrar General (see Figure 2). A pilot test of this service in the spring/summer of 2007 took place in Oakville, Thunder Bay and Brantford.¹ This service was gradually implemented across the province, with the final municipality, the City of Ottawa, implementing the service in June 2009.³

Figure 2. Electronic registration process



Temporal Changes in Data Processing

Gestational age

Information pertaining to gestational age is collected from both the birth attendant (Form 1) and the parents/informant (Form 2). Until 1990, Form 1 (Notice of Live Birth or Stillbirth, or “Physician Notification of Birth” as it is sometimes called) was used as the standard for assigning gestational age on a birth registration. However, between 1990 and June 1998, Form 2 (Statement of Live Birth), completed by the parents or an informant, was used to assign the gestational age. This led to documented problems with overestimation of preterm birth due to parental interpretation of a full-term pregnancy as 36 weeks (9 months x 4 weeks) rather than closer to 40 weeks. As of June 1998, this problem has been resolved, with Form 1 once again being used as the standard for gestational age assignment on the birth registration.^{4,5}

For the data from 1990 to 1998, the Ontario Office of the Registrar General (ORG) undertook a project to review gestational age data for those births with a gestational age of 36 weeks or less entered. If the

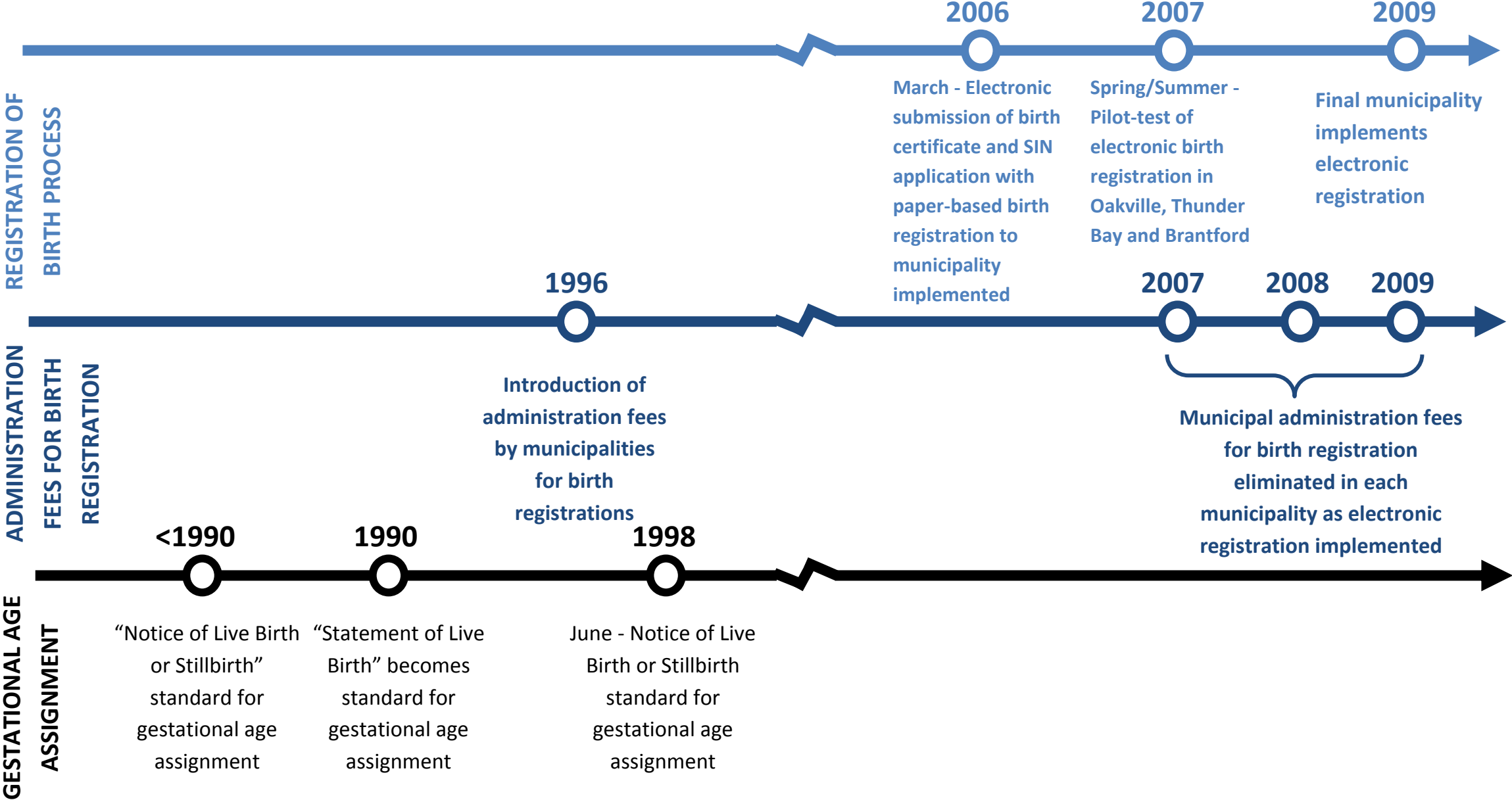
gestational age on the two data collection forms disagreed, it was re-entered using the information from Form 1. Statistics Canada analyses of these data noted that the provincial rate of preterm birth for the time period between 1990 and June 1998 averaged approximately 9% prior to these corrections. Preliminary results from the re-entry project indicated that as a result of the corrections, the rate in the same time period averaged between 5.9% and 6.2%. Currently accessible data do not contain this "corrected" variable and therefore calculation of preterm births will likely result in overestimates.⁵

Temporal Changes in Municipal Fees

In 1996, changes to Ontario law permitted municipalities to introduce an administrative fee for handling documentation for live birth registration. In those municipalities where fees were implemented, the cost to parents for registering their infant's birth ranged from \$10 to \$27.50.^{2,6} In the time period that followed, an excess of unregistered live births in municipalities that charged parents for birth registration, compared with those that did not, was observed confirming the concern that municipal fees were a barrier to birth registration, particularly in certain vulnerable groups.⁶ With the implementation of the electronic newborn registration system between March 2006 and July 2009,¹ parents are no longer required to submit birth registration documents to their municipal offices. Documentation is now directly submitted to ServiceOntario, and no fees are charged for birth registration.

Temporal changes in birth registration and municipal fees in Ontario are summarized in figure 3.

Figure 3. Timelines of Changes in Live Birth Registration in Ontario



References

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