By the end of the nineteenth century the general death rate across the population had begun to show a significant decrease. Closer scrutiny, however, showed that the rate of infant mortality was still unacceptably high. Concern grew when figures revealed that instead of a decrease, the numbers of infant deaths actually increased towards the end of the century. In some areas 150 infants out of a 1000 died before their first birthday.

There were many different opinions to explain this high rate of infant deaths. Factors such as the role of the mother, illegitimacy, and poverty and environmental conditions including housing and overcrowding, sewage removal and clean water, were all put forward as reasons. Research today shows that all of these factors contributed to the loss of young life.

Recent research has explained how specific improvements in different places helped to reduce their death rates. In Derby the introduction of Lady Health Visitors helped mothers to rear their children in a safer environment. In Leicester, an improvement in the method of sewage removal helped infants to survive.

Nottingham is probably the only Midlands local area where infant mortality fell in the early years of the twentieth century but it is difficult to explain satisfactorily why this was the case. The town continued to have some appalling housing conditions and an inadequate sewage removal system until forced into change in 1919. Although Health Visitors were employed, there is little or no evidence to demonstrate that they made a difference.