

Statistical bulletin

Birth characteristics in England and Wales: 2019

Annual live births in England and Wales by sex, birthweight, gestational age, ethnicity and month, maternities by place of birth and with multiple births, and stillbirths by age of parents and calendar quarter.



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Next release:
November to December 2021
(provisional)

Correc

3 May 2024 12:00

An error was identified in how the Percentage of live births under 2.5kg was computed. This was because of a human error, where the calculations were not adjusted following changes to processing implausible birthweights. This has been corrected in the Main points and text.

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1 . Main points

- The average age of mothers in England and Wales increased to 30.7 years in 2019 while the average age of fathers was unchanged at 33.6; both remain at record highs.
- The stillbirth rate in England and Wales hit a record low of 3.9 stillbirths per 1,000 total births in 2019; the highest stillbirth rates remain in the youngest and oldest mothers.
- Since 2010 the percentage of live births that were of low birthweight across England and Wales have remained stable; in 2019 the percentage was 6.9%.
- The West Midlands had the highest percentage of low birthweights over the decade with 8.2% of live births being of low birthweight in 2019.
- Between 2010 and 2017, the percentage of preterm live births gradually increased from 7% to 8%; however, a recent small decrease to 7.8% in 2019 indicates a potential change in this trend which we will continue to monitor.
- In 2019, 97.5% of live births occurred in an NHS establishment and 2.1% occurred at home; a trend that has remained consistent over the decade.

Statistician's comment

"In 2019, the stillbirth rate for England and Wales reached a record low of just under four stillbirths per 1,000 births. Stillbirth rates varied by age with the youngest and oldest mothers generally seeing the highest risk of stillbirth since the beginning of the century. In 2019, the percentage of preterm live births in England and Wales decreased slightly which indicates a potential change in this trend which we will continue to monitor.

By the end of this year we will release provisional figures about births in 2020 where we will assess stillbirth rates, gestational age and other factors that could have been affected by the coronavirus pandemic."

David Corps, Vital Statistics Outputs Branch, Office for National Statistics.

Follow Vital Statistics Outputs Branch on Twitter [@NickStripe_ONS](#)

2 . Birth characteristics

Following the [first release](#) of 2019 births data, this release provides detail for different birth and parental characteristics. Understanding and monitoring variation is important in order to better understand change over time in births but also because some of these characteristics may influence [infant mortality rates](#).

The data in this publication are not affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic as they relate to births occurring in 2019. However, we have been exploring the use of more timely data to provide provisional 2020 births data and this will be released soon.

The COVID-19 pandemic and England's [ambition to halve stillbirths and neonatal mortality rates by 2025](#) set the context for this release. We focus on stillbirths, birthweight, gestational age and place of birth, and review trends over time.

3 . Age of parents

The standardised mean age of mother reached a record high at 30.7 years in 2019. The standardised mean age of fathers remained unchanged from 2018 at 33.6 years. Overall, the standardised mean age of mothers and fathers has risen consistently since they were at their lowest points in the 1970s (Figure 1).

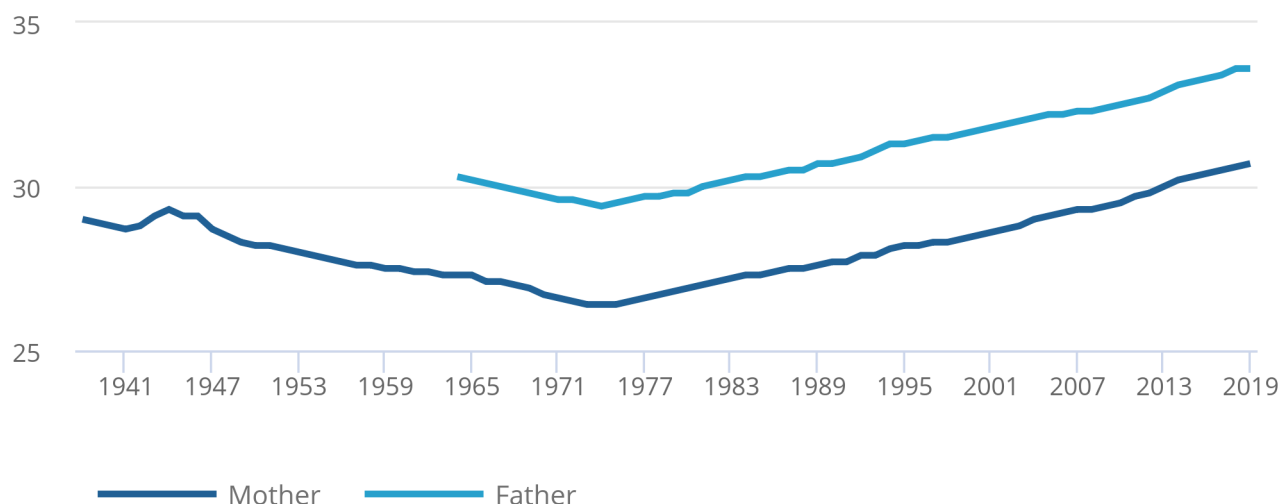
Since records for standardised mean ages for both mothers and fathers began in 1964, the age difference has remained consistent over time. In 2019, the age difference between the mean age of mothers and fathers was 2.9 years.

Figure 1: Average age of parents has increased since the mid-1970s

Standardised mean age of mothers and fathers in England and Wales, 1938 to 2019

Figure 1: Average age of parents has increased since the mid-1970s

Standardised mean age of mothers and fathers in England and Wales, 1938 to 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Births in England and Wales

Notes:

1. The mean age of mother and father is standardised. This measure eliminates the impact of any changes in the distribution of the population by age and therefore enables trends over time to be analysed.
2. Electronic data on the standardised mean age of father is not available before 1964.
3. For births registered under the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act, 2008, the age of second parent has been included with age of father and therefore included in the production of the standardised mean age of father. Given the relatively small number of births registered to same-sex couples, this has a negligible impact on the statistics.

4 . Stillbirths

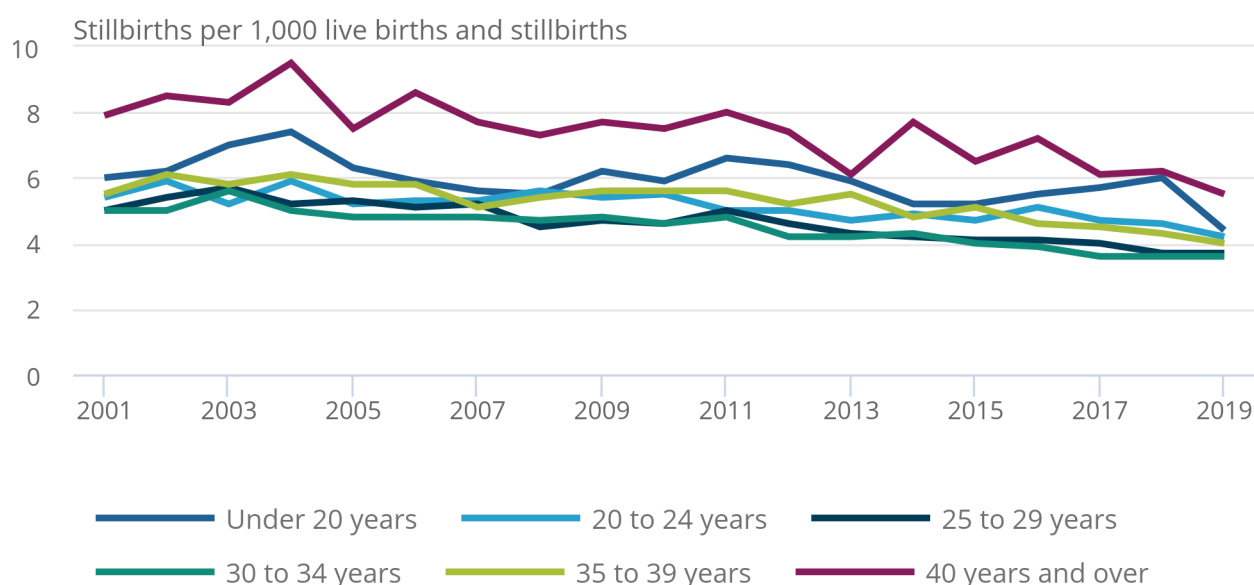
In our [first release](#) of 2019 births data we reported a record low 3.9 stillbirths per 1,000 total births in England and Wales. We continue to see variation in these rates for different birth characteristics for example by area of residence and deprivation. Also, when split by different age groups of mothers, the stillbirth rates continued to be highest amongst the oldest and youngest age groups (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Stillbirth rates remain the highest amongst the oldest and youngest age groups

Stillbirth rates by age of mother in England and Wales, 2001 to 2019

Figure 2: Stillbirth rates remain the highest amongst the oldest and youngest age groups

Stillbirth rates by age of mother in England and Wales, 2001 to 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Births in England and Wales

Notes:

1. Based on live births and stillbirths occurring in each calendar year, plus a very small number of late registrations from the previous year.

In England and Wales, the stillbirth rate for women aged 25 to 29 years has remained the same over the past two years, while the 30- to 34-year-old stillbirth rate has remained the same for the past three years. Women in these age groups [represent the largest proportion of live births](#).

In England, the government's stillbirth ambition is to [halve the rate of stillbirths between 2010 and 2025](#). Understanding the variation in rates for different characteristics, such as age or region is important in order to fully monitor progress against the ambition.

5 . Birthweight

Low birthweight is a [known risk factor](#) of infant mortality and morbidity. It is classified as [babies born weighing less than 2,500g](#).

In England and Wales, the percentage of live births classified as being of low birthweight has remained stable over the course of the decade, with a slight decrease being seen in recent years. In 2019, 6.9% of live births were classified as being of low birthweight.

Across the English regions and Wales, the West Midlands saw the highest percentage of low birthweights throughout the decade (Figure 3), with 8.2% of live births being of low birthweight in 2019. The South West saw the lowest percentage of low birthweight live births with 5.5% in 2019. The North East, East of England, South East and South West all had lower percentages of low birthweights compared with England and Wales in 2019, whilst all other English regions were higher than the England and Wales percentage.

Figure 3: Low birthweights varied across regions

Percentage of live births with low birthweights for Wales and regions in England, 2010 to 2019

Notes:

1. Low birthweight is classified as a weight less than 2,500g.
2. Percentages are calculated as a percentage of all live births.

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

6 . Gestational age

Gestational age can be broken up into three different [classifications of preterm](#):

- extremely preterm (under 28 weeks)
- very preterm (28 to 31 weeks)
- moderate preterm (32 to 36 weeks)

Since 2010, the percentage of non-preterm live births has ranged between 92% and 93% and, in 2019, the percentage was 92.2%. The percentage of preterm live births decreased by 0.1 percentage point to 7.8% in 2019. Since 2010 the percentage of preterm live births has ranged between 7% and 8% (Figure 4).

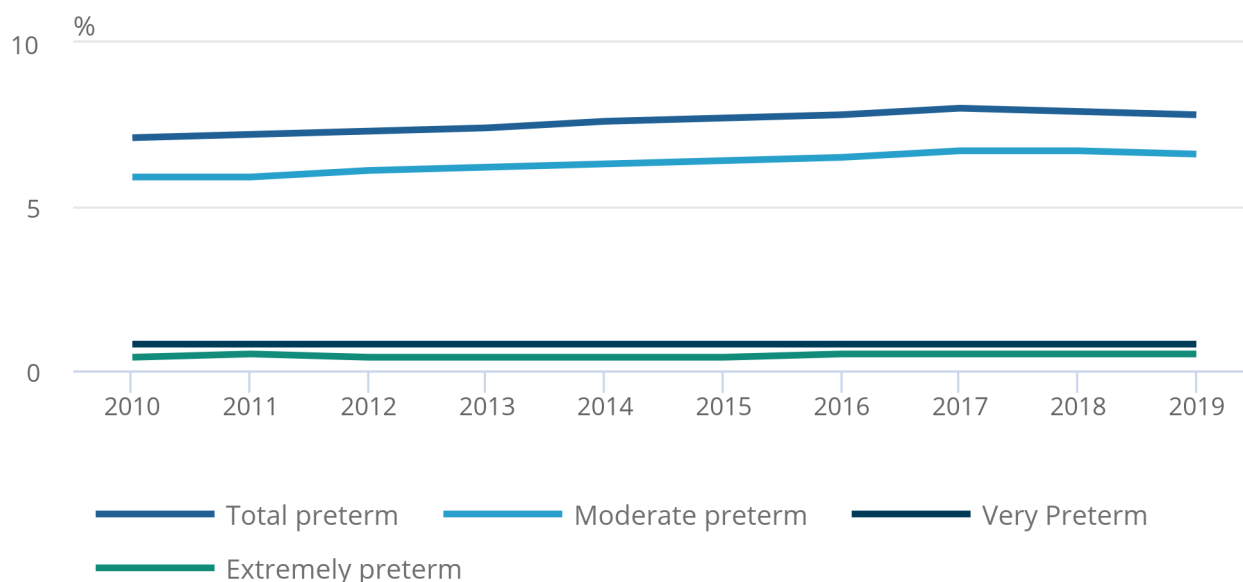
When preterm live births are split into the three categories, extremely and very preterm births have remained stable since 2010, while moderate preterm live births have levelled off in recent years.

Figure 4: Preterm live births have remained relatively consistent over the decade

Percentage of live births classified as preterm occurring in England and Wales, 2010 to 2019

Figure 4: Preterm live births have remained relatively consistent over the decade

Percentage of live births classified as preterm occurring in England and Wales, 2010 to 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Births in England and Wales

Notes:

1. Gestational age in completed weeks is recorded for all live births on the NHS Birth Notifications system. It is not available for live births from registration data. Gestational age is highly correlated with birthweight.
2. Percentages were calculated using a total that did not include live births where the gestational age was not stated or where the low gestational age was considered “not consistent” with birthweight.
3. For gestational age below 22 weeks, birthweight was checked and was considered “inconsistent” for values of 1,000 grams or more.

Gestational age is another known risk factor for [infant mortality](#). The number of live births occurring with a gestational age of under 24 weeks has [continued to increase despite the overall decrease in total live births](#). In 2019, live births where gestational age was under 24 weeks increased to 0.15% compared with 0.13% in 2018 and 0.10% in 2010. These increases may contribute to recent variations in the neonatal mortality rate and is something we continue to monitor.

7 . Place of birth

The majority of live births take place within an NHS establishment, and have continued to do so consistently over the decade. In 2019, 97.5% of live births took place in an NHS establishment.

Since the beginning of the decade, the percentage of live births occurring at home has decreased by 0.4 percentage points. Live births taking place in a non-NHS establishment or elsewhere all remained relatively consistent (Figure 5).

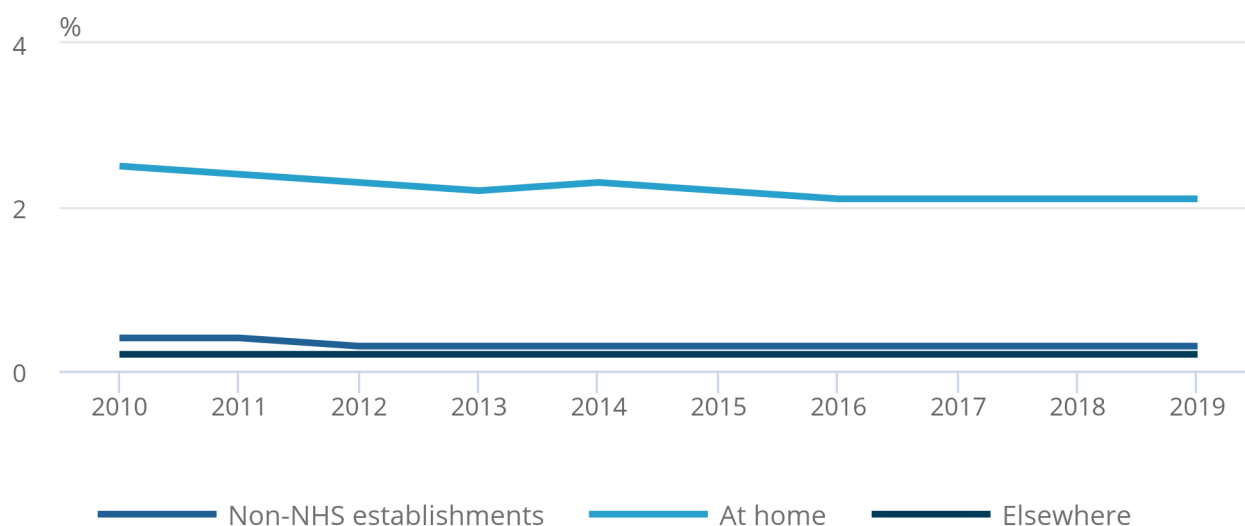
When we release provisional 2020 births statistics, we will investigate whether this pattern, and the other trends described in this release, have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 5: Most live births taking place outside of an NHS establishment have taken place at home since 2010

Percentage of live births occurring outside of an NHS establishment, 2010 to 2019

Figure 5: Most live births taking place outside of an NHS establishment have taken place at home since 2010

Percentage of live births occurring outside of an NHS establishment, 2010 to 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Births in England and Wales

8 . Births data

[Birth characteristics](#) Dataset | Released 16 November 2020 Annual live births in England and Wales by sex, birthweight, gestational age, ethnicity and month, maternities by place of birth and with multiple births, and stillbirths by age of parents and calendar quarter.

[Births by parents' characteristics](#) Dataset | Released 16 November 2020 Annual live births in England and Wales by age of mother and father, type of registration, median interval between births, number of previous live-born children and National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC).

Filter these data

- [Live births in England and Wales: birth rates down to local authority areas \(2013 to 2019\)](#)
- [Live births in England and Wales by sex and characteristics of mother: national and regional \(2013 to 2019\)](#)
- [Live births in England and Wales by characteristics of mother and father \(2013 to 2019\)](#)
- [Live births in England and Wales down to local authority local area \(2013 to 2019\)](#)
- [Live births in England and Wales for small geographic areas \(2013 to 2019\)](#)

9 . Glossary

General Register Office

The [General Register Office \(GRO\)](#) (part of the HM Passport Office) is responsible for ensuring the registration of all births, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships that have occurred in England and Wales and for maintaining a central archive.

Live birth

A baby showing signs of life at birth is a live birth.

Place of birth

Place where a birth occurs.

Standardised mean age

The standardised mean (average) age (for example, at birth or marriage) is a measure that eliminates the impact of any changes in the distribution of the population by age and therefore enables trends over time to be analysed. Standardised means are calculated using rates per 1,000 female population by single year of age of mother.

Stillbirth

A stillbirth is a baby born after 24 or more weeks' completed gestation and who did not, at any time, breathe or show signs of life.

10 . Measuring the data

Birth statistics represent births that occur and are then registered in England and Wales. Figures are derived from information recorded when live births and stillbirths are registered as part of civil registration, a legal requirement; these data represent the most complete data source available.

In England and Wales, the registration of births is a service carried out by the Local Registration Service in partnership with the General Register Office (GRO).

Birth registration data are then supplemented to obtain birthweight data by linking the birth registration to the NHS birth notification when a birth is registered.

Further linkage of the birth registration to the NHS birth notification is conducted within the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to obtain the age of the mother where this was missing on the birth registration and to enable the analysis of further characteristics such as ethnicity of the baby and gestation of live births.

More quality and methodology information on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created is available in the [Births QMI](#).

Coronavirus and birth statistics

The data in this publication are not affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic as they relate to births for the year ending 31 December 2019. In normal circumstances, births should be registered within 42 days and our annual data extract only includes births registered before 25 February. For more information, please see our [User guide to birth statistics](#).

Because of the coronavirus pandemic and the announcement of lockdown measures, birth registration services in England and Wales were temporarily suspended in March 2020. Since June 2020, birth registrations have restarted where it is safe to do so. In line with the Office for National Statistics' (ONS') response on the [production of statistics](#) during the pandemic, we are monitoring the implications of any delays in 2020 births registrations and exploring the possibility of using alternative data sources to estimate 2020 births data in a more timely manner. Provisional data for 2020 will be released soon.

11 . Strengths and limitations

Our [User guide to birth statistics](#) provides further information on data quality, legislation and procedures relating to conceptions, and it includes a [glossary of terms](#).

National Statistics status for Births in England and Wales

[National Statistics](#) status means that our statistics meet the highest standard of trustworthiness, quality and public value, and it is our responsibility to maintain compliance with these standards.

Date of most recent full assessment: [September 2011](#).

Most recent compliance check that confirms National Statistics status: [September 2011](#).

The improvements we have made since the last review include:

- revisions to the way statistics are produced are explained in the [User guide](#), detailing the year the change took place and reason why
- in cases where corrections were implemented, they were accompanied by explanations of the change and the reasons why
- where applicable, we added background information into our [User guide](#) and [QMI](#) to inform the user of the differences in methods between the UK countries and the reasons underlying these differences
- [following a consultation on proposed changes to statistics](#), we made changes in 2018 to the way that birth statistics are published; five [explorable datasets](#) are now released in July alongside the first release of annual births data, which means more detailed birth data (including small area geographies) are now available in a timelier manner

12 . Related links

[Births in England and Wales: 2019](#) Bulletin | Released 22 July 2020 Live births, stillbirths and the intensity of childbearing, measured by the total fertility rate.

[Births by parents' country of birth, England and Wales: 2019](#) Bulletin | Released 22 July 2020 Annual statistics on live births including countries of birth for non-UK-born mothers and fathers.

[Baby names in England and Wales: 2019](#) Bulletin | Released 26 August 2020 Most popular first names for baby boys and girls in 2019 using birth registration data.

[Births in Scotland](#) Web page | Updated as new data become available National Records of Scotland's (NRS') statistics on births.

[Births in Northern Ireland](#) Web page | Updated as new data become available Births statistics from 1887 onwards and Baby Names statistics from 1997 onwards for Northern Ireland.

[User guide to birth statistics](#) Article | Released 16 November 2020 Supporting information for birth statistics, which present figures on births that occur and are then registered in England and Wales. Figures are based on information collected at birth registration.