



Office for Health
Improvement
& Disparities

Breastfeeding prevalence at 6 to 8 weeks after birth (Experimental Statistics)

2020/2021 Annual Data Statistical Commentary (November 2021)

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Main findings

The aggregate breastfeeding rate for England for 2020/2021 is 47.6% (with confidence intervals of 47.5 – 47.7%). This is based on 144 out of 149 reporting local authorities who provided sufficient quarterly data for annual figures to be calculated. This compares to 48% in 2019/2020, 46.2% in 2018/19, 43.1% in 2017/18, 44.4% in 2016/17, and to 43.2% for 2015/16. 2015/16 data was collected by NHS England.

Breastfeeding prevalence at a PHE centre level can be published for the North East. All other areas fail to meet validation at stage 3 (known breastfeeding status for infants age 6-8 weeks is lower than the 95% quality standard).

Breastfeeding prevalence can be published for 65 local authorities (passing all 3 stages of validation) and percentages range from 23.1% to 88.6%.

This statistical commentary should be considered alongside the [data file: breastfeeding at 6 to 8 weeks, 2020 to 2021 annual \(November 2021 release\)](#).

Please treat the figures with caution: where totals are presented for England and PHE centres, these are aggregate totals of the local authorities that submitted information and passed initial validation.

Background

In October 2015, the responsibility for commissioning children's public health for the 0-5 years' population transferred from NHS England to local authorities. To support this transfer Public Health England established an interim data collection for a number of key performance indicators associated with these services which it is critical to monitor and report.

The breastfeeding information within this publication has been obtained via the interim reporting system to collect health visiting activity at a local authority resident level. It was submitted to PHE by local authorities on a voluntary basis. It covers Quarters 1-4 of 2020/2021. The [data file: breastfeeding at 6 to 8 weeks, 2020 to 2021 annual \(November 2021 release\)](#) contains the full data.

The decision has been taken to publish this information as 'experimental statistics' on the basis that there has been a significant change to the reporting methods, both in units of collection and the mandatory/voluntary nature.

Data Collection Method

An interim reporting system is hosted on the Local Government Association (LGA) website to collect the data on health visiting indicators. The data collection window was open between Monday 10 May and Friday 25 June for all quarters of 2020 to 2021. In recognition of the difficulties that local authorities encountered submitting data as they responded to the COVID-19 pandemic, some submissions and amendments were accepted after the deadline so that local authorities were not disadvantaged because of current pressures where they wished to submit data.

To support local authorities in submitting data, [detailed guidance](#) was circulated to explain how analysts and commissioners in local authorities should submit data.

A dedicated mailbox, interimreporting@phe.gov.uk, was also in place to respond to questions and comments.

Once the collection window closes the data received is centrally collated, validated and reported.

Data Quality Findings

Out of 149 reporting local authorities, 146 submitted a return for the interim reporting collection for at least 3 quarters in 2020/2021.

Prior to validation, a process of estimation was applied to any local authority data where a return was submitted for only 3 quarters in 2020/2021, or 'don't know' (DK) was submitted for any data item. An estimated numerator for the missing quarter was calculated as an average of the numerators of the other 3 quarters, and the same for an estimated denominator. Where a numerator or denominator has been submitted as 0, no estimation has been performed. An annual numerator and denominator have been calculated based on the estimated numerator and denominator and the known numerators and denominators.

2 local authorities did not submit sufficient data for estimation to take place, and no data have been published:

Local authority	PHE Centre
West Sussex	South East
Greenwich	London

This has affected areas which reported DK for any data item in two or more quarters. Further validation was performed on annual data for 144 local authorities.

Stage 1 Validation

Definition: Local authorities to submit integers for the 'number of infants totally breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks' and/or the 'number of infants partially breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks' and the combined total must be lower than or equal to the integer for the 'number of infants due a 6-8 week check'. If there is DK in the combined total or the denominator the local authority will automatically fail validation.

Stage 1 validation was not applied to annual data as areas with a valid annual figure calculated from previously published quarterly data automatically pass validation.

Stage 2 Validation

Definition: The value submitted for infants due a 6-8 week review must be within 20% of the resident population of babies aged zero for that local authority. The annual figure is

divided by four to provide a quarterly estimate. Any values within 20% tolerance of the mid-year population figure for the quarter will pass this check.

All 144 valid submissions went on to pass stage 2.

Please see the section 'Data Quality Notes' towards the end of this commentary which provides further details.

Stage 3 Validation

Definition: The percentage of infants whose breastfeeding status was recorded must meet the data quality standard of 95%, being between 95% and 100%. This means the sum of those infants totally breastfed, partially breastfed and not breastfed should be greater than or equal to 95% of the number of infants due a 6-8 week review.

The threshold of 95% coverage applies to local authorities and PHE centres, but for the aggregated England value the threshold is 85%.

Of the 144 submissions passing stage 2 validation, 65 went on to pass stage 3.

The 79 local authorities that failed stage 3 validation are:

Local authority	PHE Centre
Stockton on Tees	North East
Blackburn with Darwen	North West
Blackpool	North West
Bolton	North West
Bury	North West
Cumbria	North West
Halton	North West
Knowsley	North West
Lancashire	North West
Liverpool	North West
Trafford	North West
Wigan	North West
Wirral	North West
Calderdale	Yorkshire and The Humber

Local authority	PHE Centre
Kirklees	Yorkshire and The Humber
Leeds	Yorkshire and The Humber
Sheffield	Yorkshire and The Humber
York	Yorkshire and The Humber
Derby	East Midlands
Leicester	East Midlands
Leicestershire	East Midlands
Rutland	East Midlands
Birmingham	West Midlands
Coventry	West Midlands
Shropshire	West Midlands
Staffordshire	West Midlands
Local Authority	PHE Centre
Telford and Wrekin	West Midlands
Walsall	West Midlands
Warwickshire	West Midlands
Wolverhampton	West Midlands
Worcestershire	West Midlands
Cambridgeshire	East of England
Hertfordshire	East of England
Norfolk	East of England
Peterborough	East of England
Barking and Dagenham	London
Barnet	London
Brent	London
Bromley	London
Croydon	London
Ealing	London
Enfield	London

Local authority	PHE Centre
Hackney and City of London*	London
Hammersmith and Fulham	London
Haringey	London
Harrow	London
Hillingdon	London
Hounslow	London
Islington	London
Kensington and Chelsea	London
Kingston upon Thames	London
Lambeth	London
Newham	London
Redbridge	London
Richmond upon Thames	London
Southwark	London
Sutton	London
Tower Hamlets	London
Waltham Forest	London
Wandsworth	London
Westminster	London
Brighton and Hove	South East
East Sussex	South East
Hampshire	South East
Isle of Wight	South East
Kent	South East
Local Authority	PHE Centre
Medway	South East
Oxfordshire	South East
Surrey	South East
Windsor and Maidenhead	South East

Local authority	PHE Centre
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole	South West
Bristol	South West
Dorset	South West
North Somerset	South West
Somerset	South West
South Gloucestershire	South West
Swindon	South West
Torbay	South West
Wiltshire	South West

* Joint submission

Each local authority has to pass all three stages of validation in order for its values to be shown.

Passed all validation

Full information for 65 local authorities that passed all validation is published in the [data file: breastfeeding at 6 to 8 weeks, 2020 to 2021 annual \(November 2021 release\)](#).

Local authority	PHE Centre
County Durham	North East
Darlington	North East
Gateshead	North East
Hartlepool	North East
Middlesbrough	North East
Newcastle upon Tyne	North East
North Tyneside	North East
Northumberland	North East
Redcar and Cleveland	North East
South Tyneside	North East
Sunderland	North East
Cheshire East	North West

Local authority	PHE Centre
Cheshire West and Chester	North West
Manchester	North West
Oldham	North West
Rochdale	North West
Local Authority	PHE Centre
Salford	North West
Sefton	North West
St Helens	North West
Stockport	North West
Tameside	North West
Warrington	North West
Barnsley	Yorkshire and The Humber
Bradford	Yorkshire and The Humber
Doncaster	Yorkshire and The Humber
East Riding of Yorkshire	Yorkshire and The Humber
Kingston upon Hull	Yorkshire and The Humber
North East Lincolnshire	Yorkshire and The Humber
North Lincolnshire	Yorkshire and The Humber
North Yorkshire	Yorkshire and The Humber
Rotherham	Yorkshire and The Humber
Derbyshire	East Midlands
Lincolnshire	East Midlands
Northamptonshire	East Midlands
Nottingham	East Midlands
Nottinghamshire	East Midlands
Dudley	West Midlands
Herefordshire	West Midlands
Sandwell	West Midlands
Solihull	West Midlands

Local authority	PHE Centre
Stoke on Trent	West Midlands
Bedford	East of England
Central Bedfordshire	East of England
Essex	East of England
Luton	East of England
Milton Keynes	East of England
Southend on Sea	East of England
Suffolk	East of England
Thurrock	East of England
Camden	London
Lewisham	London
Merton	London
Bracknell Forest	South East
Buckinghamshire	South East
Portsmouth	South East
Reading	South East
Slough	South East
Local Authority	PHE Centre
Southampton	South East
West Berkshire	South East
Wokingham	South East
Bath and North East Somerset	South West
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly*	South West
Devon	South West
Gloucestershire	South West
Plymouth	South West

* Joint submission

Data quality notes

When making a submission, local authorities have the opportunity to enter comments in a free text box to explain any issues with reporting. Many local authorities also used this route to make PHE aware of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the service and on their data.

During the submission of 2020/2021 data, comments were received from four local authorities related to breastfeeding. Two local authorities provided general comments and three commented on the impact of the pandemic. One local authority said that the delivery of reviews had reduced or been delayed as a result of the pandemic. For one local authority, the transfer of IT systems was delayed due to staff needing to prioritise Covid-19 work.

Where local authorities are unable to separate out 'totally' and 'partially' breastfed (because of local processes or data collection), it is still extremely useful for them to report the combined total, as this forms the numerator of the breastfeeding prevalence indicator. A communication was issued asking local authorities to report the combined total in either the 'total' or 'partial' boxes. On review, the communication should have specified that the total be entered in the 'partial' box as it is known that these infants are at least partially breastfed. Breastfeeding data has been amended to report as 'partially breastfed' where local authorities can be identified as having reported a combined total as 'totally breastfed'. It can therefore be assumed that for higher geographies containing an affected local authority, the aggregate value for 'totally breastfed' is slightly low (and the aggregate value for 'partially breastfed' is correspondingly slightly high), but this is judged to be the most accurate way of describing the situation as the combined percentage will be a true reflection of the submitted data. This affects the following local authorities:

Dudley and Stoke-on-Trent were identified as having reported combined totals for at least one quarter of 2020/2021.

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