

Statistical bulletin

Birth characteristics in England and Wales: 2016

Annual live births by sex, 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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1 . Main points

- There were 696,271 live births in England and Wales in 2016, of which 49% were girls and 51% were boys.
- The percentage of women giving birth at home was 2.1% in 2016, a small decrease compared with 2012 to 2015 when it was 2.3%.
- 10,951 mothers had a multiple birth in 2016; 10,786 women had twins, 160 had triplets and 5 had quads and above (multiple births include stillbirths).
- 15.9 out of every 1,000 women giving birth had a multiple birth in 2016; this represents a small fall compared with 16.1 in 2015.
- Women aged 45 and over were most likely to have a multiple birth; 87.2 out of every 1,000 women giving birth in this age group had a multiple birth.
- 7.0% (48,490) of live births were low birthweight (under 2.5kg) in 2016, unchanged since 2011.

2 . Statistician's comment

The proportion of women having multiple births in 2016 decreased slightly compared with 2015. This decrease was driven by women aged 30 and over, particularly those aged 45 and over where the proportion of women having multiple births decreased by 15%. Since 1993, women aged 45 and over have consistently had the highest proportion of multiple births – partly due to higher levels of assisted fertility treatments at these ages.

Nicola Haines, Vital Statistics Outputs Branch, Office for National Statistics.

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3 . Things you need to know about this release

Important information for interpreting these birth statistics:

- birth statistics represent births which occurred in England and Wales in the calendar year, but include a very small number of late registrations from the previous year
- figures are compiled from information supplied when births are registered as part of civil registration, a legal requirement
- a maternity is a pregnancy resulting in the birth of one or more children including stillbirths

4 . Women aged between 35 and 39 are most likely to have a home birth

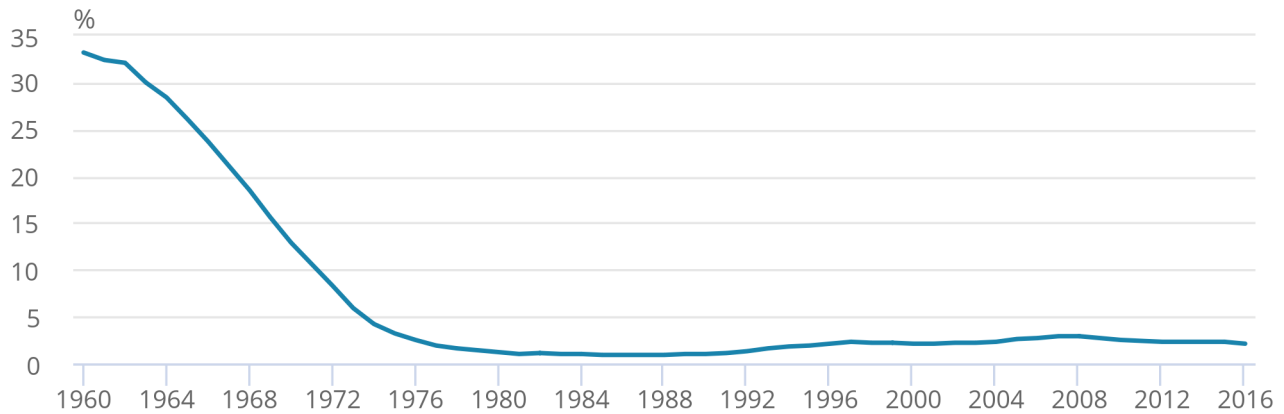
In 2016 in England and Wales, 2.1% of maternities took place at home (Figure 1). This represents a slight decrease compared with 2012 to 2015 when 2.3% of maternities took place at home.

Figure 1: Percentage of women giving birth at home, 1960 to 2016

England and Wales

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England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. This chart shows the percentage of women giving birth at home rather than the percentage of babies born at home – this includes stillbirths.

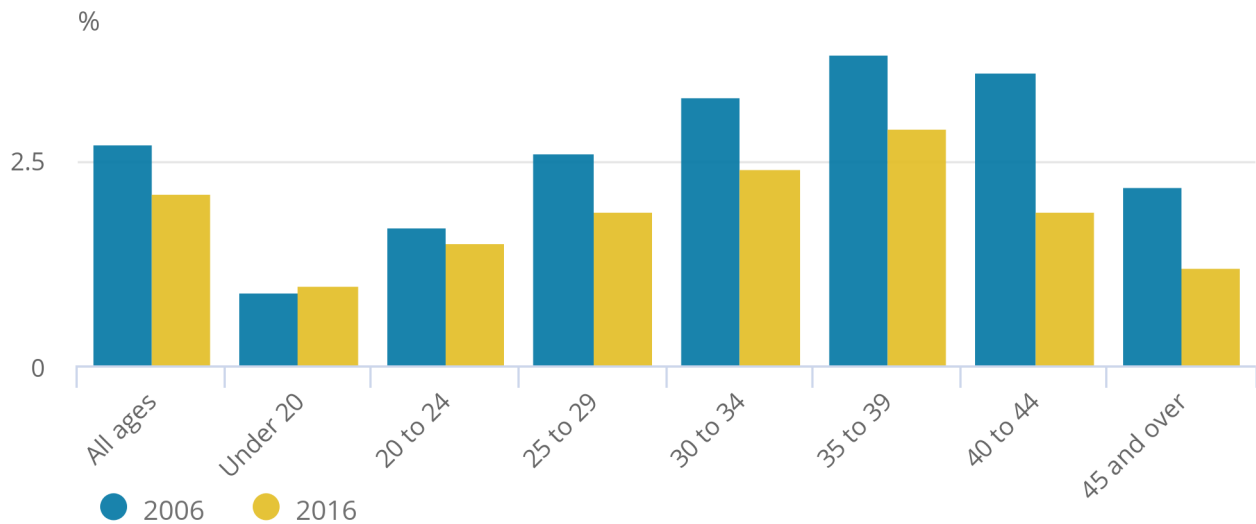
In 2016, women aged 35 to 39 were most likely to give birth at home (2.9%), whilst women aged under 20 were least likely (1.0%). Over the last decade, women aged 30 and over have recorded the largest decreases in the percentage of women giving birth at home (Figure 2). Among the under-twenties, the percentage of women giving birth at home in 2016 is slightly higher than in 2006.

Figure 2: Percentage of women within each age group giving birth at home, 2006 and 2016

England and Wales

Figure 2: Percentage of women within each age group giving birth at home, 2006 and 2016

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. The percentage of women giving birth at home is reported within each age group. For example in 2016, 1.5% of all women aged 20 to 24 gave birth at home - this includes stillbirths.

In England 2.1% of women gave birth at home in 2016 while in Wales the figure was 2.7%. The South West was the region of England with the highest percentage of women giving birth at home; 2.9% in 2016, down from 3.1% in 2015. The North East had the lowest; 1.0% in 2016, down from 1.1% in 2015. The South West and the North East have recorded the highest and lowest percentages respectively of women giving birth at home since 2002 when these figures were first published by region.

5 . The small fall in the rate of women having multiple births was driven by those aged 30 and over

In 2016, there were 10,786 women who gave birth to twins, 160 to triplets and 5 to quads and above. These multiple maternities include both live births and stillbirths.

Although most multiple births occur naturally, many occur as a result of fertility treatment. On average multiple births tend to have lower birthweights than singletons, multiple pregnancies are also associated with a higher risk of stillbirth, [infant deaths](#) and child disability.

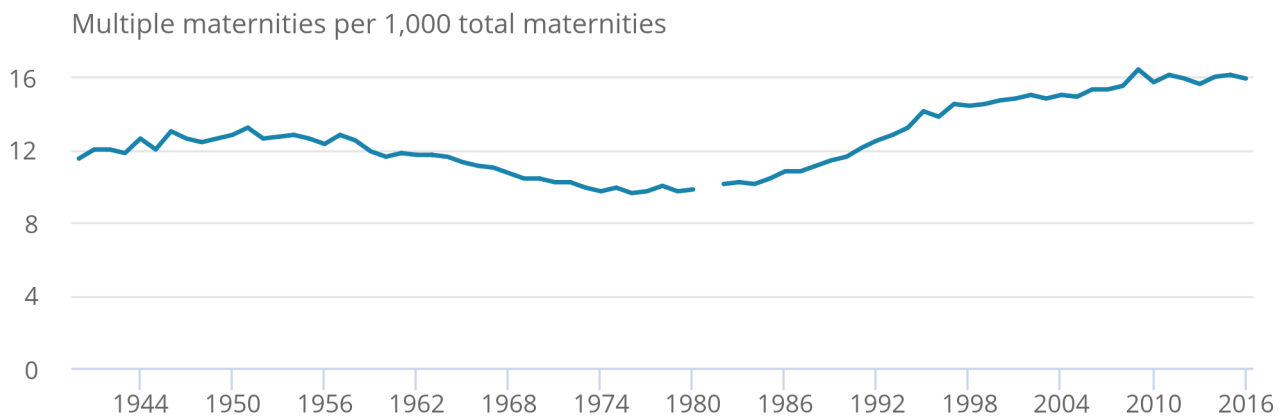
The multiple maternity rate in 2016 decreased slightly to 15.9 per 1,000 women giving birth, compared with 16.1 in 2015. The largest increase in the multiple maternity rate was recorded between 1990 and 1995, when the rate increased by 22% from 11.6 to 14.1 (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Multiple maternity rate, 1940 to 2016

England and Wales

Figure 3: Multiple maternity rate, 1940 to 2016

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Maternity figures for 1981 are not available due to a registrars strike. Due to the delay of live birth returns only a 10% sample was processed.

Since 1993, women aged 45 and over have consistently recorded the highest multiple maternity rate; this is due to higher levels of assisted fertility treatments at these ages, including medicines which stimulate ovulation and assisted conception which includes In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF).

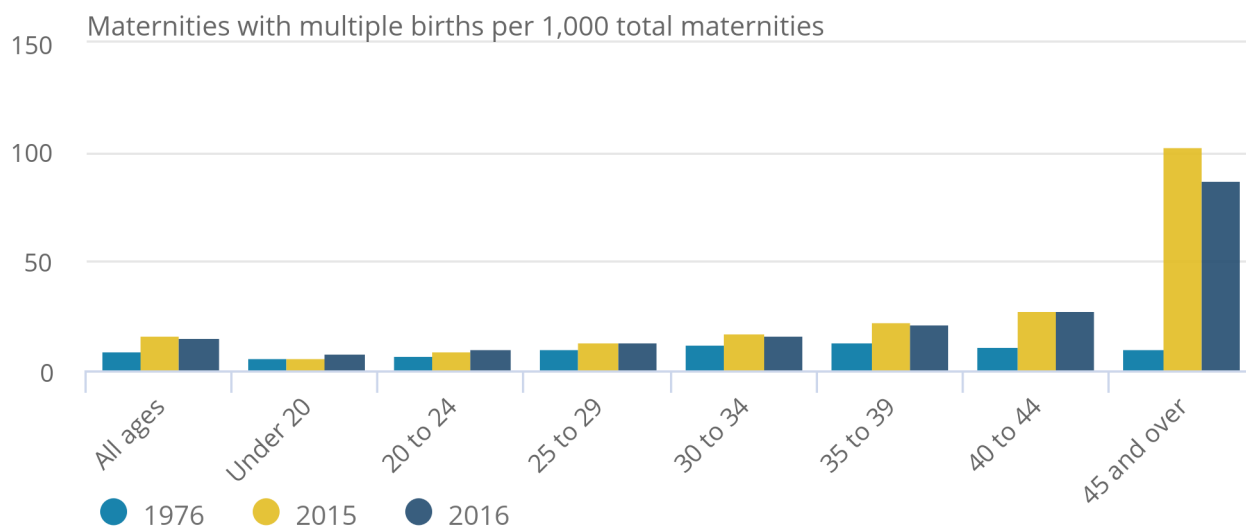
When comparing 2016 with 2015, the overall decrease in the multiple maternity rate has been driven by the fall in the rate for women aged 30 and over; the rate increased slightly for women aged under 25, but remained unchanged for those aged 25 to 29 (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Women having multiple births by age of mother, 1976, 2015 and 2016

England and Wales

Figure 4: Women having multiple births by age of mother, 1976, 2015 and 2016

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

- Multiple births arising from a single pregnancy are counted as one maternity. The number of maternities indicates the number of women having babies (including stillbirths) rather than the number of babies born.

It is estimated that [IVF conceptions are 11 times more likely to result in a multiple birth than natural conceptions](#). [In 2014, 16% of IVF pregnancies resulted in a multiple birth](#). With nearly 19,000 IVF babies born in the UK in 2014, IVF contributes significantly to the multiple birth rate.

In January 2009, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) introduced a [policy to minimise the risk of multiple births from IVF treatment](#). The policy set an overall goal to reduce the national multiple birth rate to 10% and a maximum multiple birth rate that clinics must not exceed, which has been lowered each year since 2009. The HFEA monitors and inspects clinics to ensure they are working towards the target and each clinic must have its own “multiple births minimisation strategy”.

6 . Gestational age varies by ethnicity

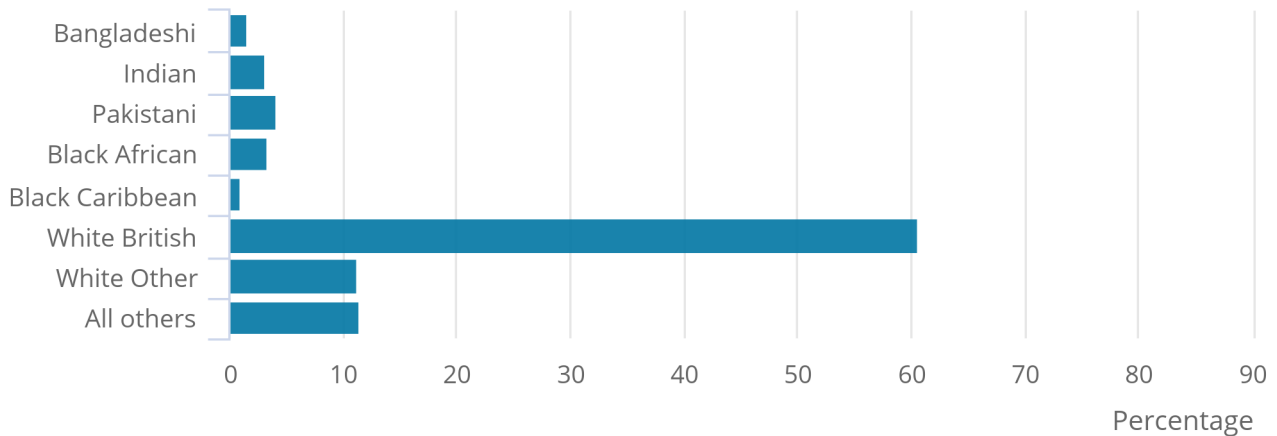
In 2016, the greatest percentage of all live births (60.6%) occurred in the White British group. The lowest percentages for all live births were for babies from the Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean groups with 1.5% and 0.9% of all live births respectively.

Figure 5: Live births by ethnic group, 2016

England and Wales

Figure 5: Live births by ethnic group, 2016

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Ethnic group of the baby as stated by the mother. Excludes births where the ethnicity was not stated.

The highest percentage of births before 37 weeks gestation occurred in the Black Caribbean ethnic group with 10.4% of births being classed as pre-term. The White Other ethnic group has the lowest percentage of pre-term births with 6.6% of live births occurring before 37 weeks gestation. More detailed data for live births by ethnicity and gestation are available in [Table 7](#).

7 . Stillbirths decrease as gestational age increases

In 2016, the stillbirth rate for England and Wales fell to 4.4 per 1,000 total births; the lowest rate since 1992 when it was 4.3. The [maternal and fetal risk factors for stillbirths](#) include maternal obesity, smoking, and fetal growth restriction. Stillbirth rates reduce greatly as gestational age increases. In 2016, the stillbirth rate for babies born at 24 weeks gestation was 356.4 stillbirths per 1,000 total births, this compares with a rate of 1.2 at 40 weeks gestation.

8 . Percentage of babies with low birthweight remains unchanged since 2011

Low birthweight (under 2.5kg), one of the known risk factors for infant deaths, can be caused by a number of factors including smoking; babies born to women who smoke weigh, on average, 200g less than babies born to non-smokers ([NHS, Stop smoking in pregnancy](#)).

In England and Wales, 7.0% (48,490) of live births were low birthweight in 2016, unchanged since 2011. In England, 7.0% of live births were of low birthweight compared with 6.9% in Wales.

The percentage of live births with low birthweight varies by region within England; West Midlands had the highest percentage of low birthweight babies (8.3%); the South East had the lowest percentage (6.0%). The percentage of live births under 2.5kg will also be published by local authority in [Births by area of usual residence](#).

Babies born weighing more than 4kg are considered to be of high birthweight. In 2016, 10.7% of live births in England and Wales weighed 4kg and above; relatively unchanged since 2009 (live births with a birth weight of 4kg and above are published back to 2009). In England 10.7% of babies weighed 4kg and above, while in Wales the figure was 11.4%.

The South West had the highest percentage of live births with a high birthweight (12.4%), while London had the lowest (8.6%). Gestational diabetes and a body mass index (BMI) over 30 in the mother are some of the risk factors for babies that are large for gestational age ([NHS, Overweight and pregnant](#)).

9 . Links to related statistics

More data on births in England and Wales by [birth characteristics](#) (stillbirths, home births, hospital births, multiple births, birthweight, gestational age and ethnicity) are available on our website. The dataset also contains information on the other birth statistics packages released throughout the year and provides links to these; see the [GOV.UK release calendar](#) for information on planned publication dates.

The number of births, birth rates and mean age of mother for the UK and constituent countries can be found in the [Vital Statistics: Population and Health Reference tables](#), international comparisons of live birth rates are also available.

[An overview of stillbirth numbers and rates in England and Wales since 1927 and a European comparison](#) was published in September 2015. Further statistics on stillbirths, including figures by cause group, birthweight and pregnancy and ethnic factors can be found in [Child Mortality Statistics](#).

Special extracts and tabulations of birth data for England and Wales are available to order (subject to legal frameworks, disclosure control, resources and our [charging policy](#), where appropriate). Enquiries should be made to Vital Statistics Outputs Branch by email to vsob@ons.gsi.gov.uk or telephone on +44 (0)1329 444110. [User-requested data](#) will be made publicly available.

10 . Quality and methodology

This publication provides statistics on stillbirths, birthweight, gestational age and ethnicity, women giving birth at home and women having multiple births. Some of the main summary figures have been published previously. This is however, the first time that birth statistics for 2016 have been published on:

- birth weight and mother's area of usual residence (only live births with low birth weight have previously been published)
- gestational age and ethnicity
- age of parents and quarter of occurrence for stillbirths
- quarter and month of occurrence for live births
- place of birth
- multiple maternities
- maternities, live births, and stillbirths in hospitals by area of occurrence

Birth statistics are used for planning maternity services, to inform policy decisions and resource allocation, for example, deciding numbers of school places required. They also enable the analysis of social and demographic trends.

The [Births Quality and Methodology Information](#) document contains important information on:

- the strengths and limitations of the data and how it compares with related data
- uses and users
- how the output was created
- the quality of the output including the accuracy of the data

Our [User Guide to Birth Statistics](#) provides further information on data quality, legislation and procedures relating to births and includes a glossary of terms.

There is a large degree of comparability in birth statistics between UK countries. However, there are some differences, although these are believed to have a negligible impact on the comparability of the statistics. These differences are outlined in our [Quality and Methodology Information](#) for births.

The [Revisions policy for population statistics \(including birth statistics\)](#) is available on our website.

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

Statistics on home births show the number of women giving birth at home (maternities), rather than the number of babies born at home.

A maternity is a pregnancy resulting in the birth of one or more children, including stillbirths. Multiple births arising from a single pregnancy are counted as one maternity, although each child born is counted separately in analyses of birth statistics (the number of maternities indicates the number of women having babies rather than the number of babies born).

Ethnicity is not collected at birth registration. The statistics in this report have been derived by linking [birth notifications](#) to birth registrations. Ethnicity of the baby, as stated by the mother, is recorded on birth notifications.

