

Statistical bulletin

# Births in England and Wales by Characteristics of Birth 2: 2012

Home births and multiple births in England broken down by mothers' age group.



Contact:  
Elizabeth McLaren  
vsob@ons.gsi.gov.uk

Release date:  
21 November 2013

Next release:  
17 November 2014

## Table of contents

1. [Main findings](#)
2. [Summary](#)
3. [Home births](#)
4. [Multiple births](#)
5. [Users and uses of characteristics of birth 2 statistics](#)
6. [Planned changes to birth statistics](#)
7. [Further information](#)
8. [References](#)
9. [Background notes](#)

# 1. Main findings

- There were 729,674 live births in England and Wales in 2012, of which 355,328 were girls and 374,346 were boys
- The percentage of women giving birth at home decreased slightly to 2.3% in 2012, compared with 2.4% in 2011
- 15.9 out of every 1,000 women giving birth had a multiple birth in 2012, compared with 16.1 in 2011
- 11,441 mothers had a multiple birth in 2012; 11,228 women had twins, 208 had triplets and 5 had quads and above (multiple births include stillbirths)
- Women aged 45 and over were most likely to have a multiple birth (115.5 out of every 1,000 women giving birth in this age group had a multiple birth)

## 2. Summary

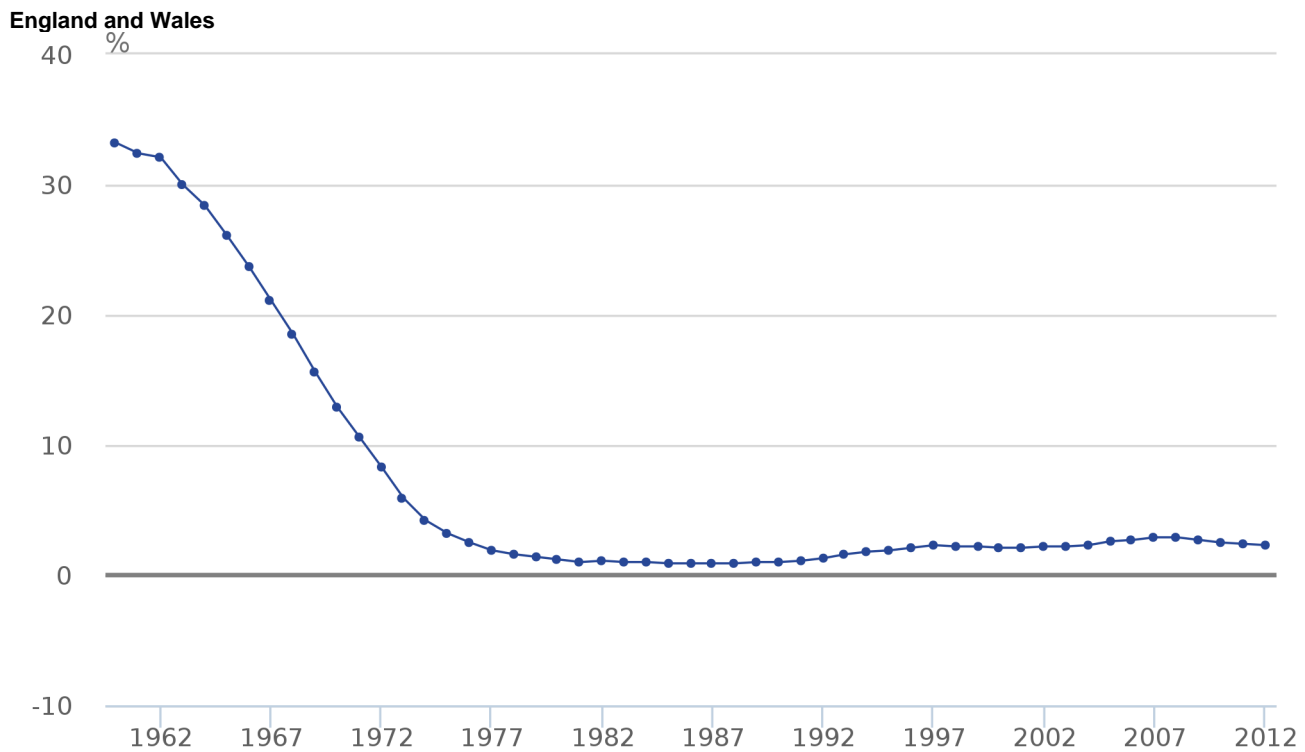
This bulletin presents statistics on births in England and Wales in 2012 by characteristics of birth. In particular, it provides statistics for women giving birth at home and for women having multiple births. Some of the key summary figures have been published previously by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). This is however the first time that birth statistics for 2012 have been published:

- by quarter and month
- by place of birth
- for multiple maternities

## 3. Home births

In 2012 in England and Wales, 2.3% of women giving birth did so at home (Figure 1). This represents a small decrease from 2.4% in 2011. In 1960, the percentage of women giving birth at home was 33%, but this fell to a record low between 1985 and 1988 when only 0.9% of women gave birth at home. Between 1988 and 2008 there was a small rise in the percentage of women giving birth at home, with the exception of a period of relative stability between 1997 and 2004. More recently, between 2009 and 2012, the percentage of women giving birth at home has declined slightly.

**Figure 1: Maternities taking place at home, 1960–2012**



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. A maternity is a pregnancy resulting in the birth of one or more children, including stillbirths. The chart therefore shows the percentage of women giving birth at home rather than the percentage of babies born at home

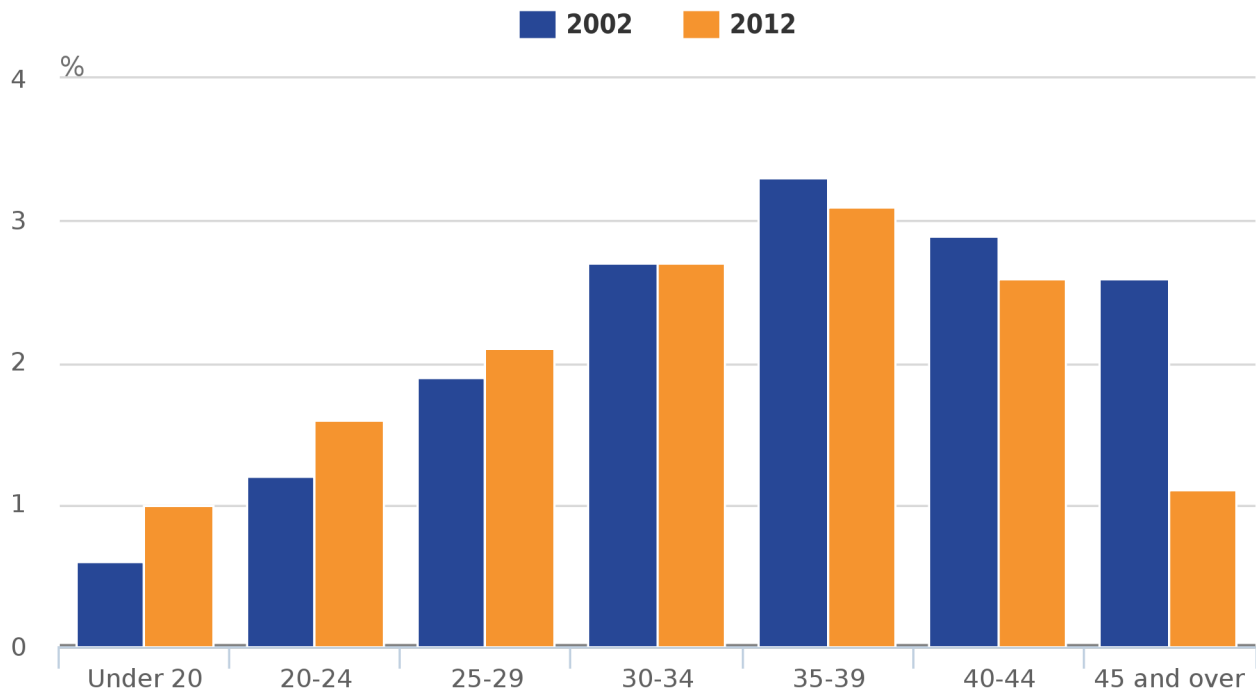
In 1950s post-war Britain, the health service ran campaigns to persuade mothers to go into hospital to give birth. At this time housing conditions and general health were relatively poor and for many women, hospital would have been the safest environment in which to give birth. The shift away from home births took place largely between 1963 and 1974, during which time the percentage of women giving birth at home fell from 30% to 4.2%, at a rate of two to three percentage points per year. During this time the stillbirth rate fell from 17.2 stillbirths per 1,000 births (live and stillbirths) in 1963 to 11.1 in 1974. In recent years the National Health Service (NHS) have encouraged women to exercise greater choice in where they give birth ([Department of Health, 2007](#)).

The South West had the highest percentage of women giving birth at home in 2012 (3.2%) while the North East had the lowest (1.1%). The South West and the North East also had the highest and lowest percentages respectively, of women giving birth at home in 2011.

In 2012, women aged 35-39 had the highest percentage of births at home (3.1%). In contrast women aged under 20 had the lowest percentage, with 1.0% of women in this age group giving birth at home in 2012. Figure 2 shows how the percentage of women giving birth at home varies by age group and provides a comparison between 2002 and 2012. The percentages of women giving birth at home have decreased in all age groups over 35 and have increased in all age groups under 30 (with 30-34 unchanged).

**Figure 2: Maternities taking place at home, by age of mother, 2002 and 2012**

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. A maternity is a pregnancy resulting in the birth of one or more children, including stillbirths. The chart therefore shows the percentage of women giving birth at home rather than the percentage of babies born at home
2. The percentage of women giving birth at home is reported within each age group. For example in 2012, 1.6% of all maternities to women aged 20-24 took place at home

[Nove et al \(2008\) \(819.1 Kb Pdf\)](#) provides a detailed analysis of home births in the UK, from 1955 to 2006. The article examines how home maternity levels vary according to mother's age, number of previous live births within marriage, country of birth and local authority.

## 4. Multiple births

In 2012, there were 11,228 women who gave birth to twins, 208 to triplets and 5 to quads and above. These multiple maternities (see background note 5) include both live births and stillbirths.

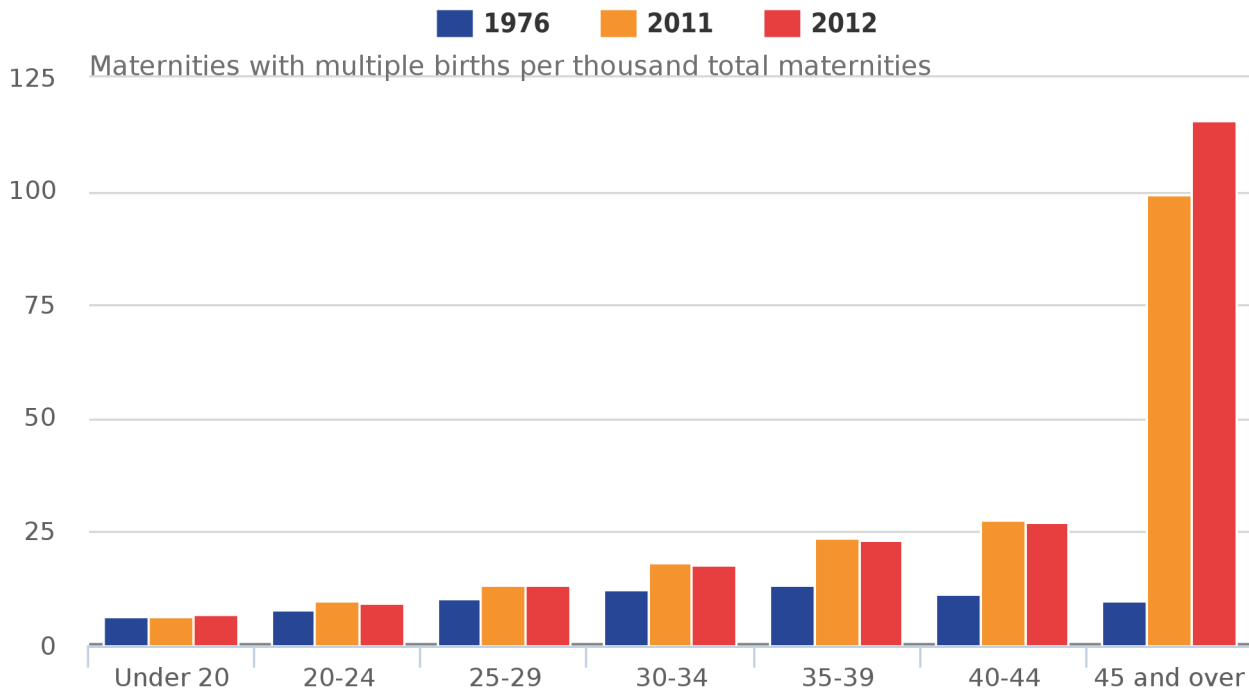
The multiple maternity rate in 2012 decreased slightly to 15.9 per 1,000 women giving birth, compared with 16.1 in 2011. Overall the multiple maternity rate has increased since 1976 when there were 9.6 multiple maternities per 1,000 maternities. The largest increase in the multiple maternity rate was recorded between 1990 and 1995 when the rate rose from 11.6 to 14.1, an increase of 22%.

In 1976, women aged 35-39 had the highest multiple maternity rate (13.4 per 1,000 maternities). Since 1976 the multiple maternity rate has increased for all ages but most notably for women aged 30 and over (Figure 3). The greatest increase was among women aged 45 and over where the multiple maternity rate rose from 9.8 in 1976 to 115.5 in 2012.

When comparing 2012 to 2011, the multiple maternity rate decreased for all age groups with the exception of women aged under 20 and 45 and over. Women aged 45 and over had by far the highest multiple maternity rate in 2012 (115.5 per 1,000 maternities), increasing 16% since 2011. Women aged under 20 had the lowest multiple maternity rate in 2012 (6.7 per 1,000 maternities) increasing 3.1% since 2011. The largest multiple maternity rate decrease between 2011 and 2012 was to women aged 20-24 decreasing by 6.0% to 9.4 per 1,000 maternities.

**Figure 3: Maternities with multiple births by age of mother, 1976, 2011 and 2012**

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. 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

On average multiple births tend to have lower birthweights than singletons ([Office for National Statistics, 2013](#)) which is one reason why the infant mortality rate is around five times higher for multiple births than for singleton births. Multiple pregnancies are also associated with a higher risk of stillbirth, death under 28 days and child disability ([Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority \(HFEA\), 2013](#)).

Although most multiple births occur naturally, many occur as a result of fertility treatment. On average, 1 in 5 of In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF) pregnancies result in multiple births compared with 1 in 80 for women who conceive naturally ([HFEA, 2013](#)). With approximately 13,000 IVF babies being born each year this contributes significantly to the multiple birth rate.

In 2009, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority launched the elective single embryo transfer (eSET) policy, which allowed centres to develop their own eSET strategy, with the aim to reduce the UK IVF multiple pregnancy rate to 10% over a period of years ([HFEA, 2013](#)).

## 5. Users and uses of characteristics of birth 2 statistics

Multiple birth statistics and the number of home births are monitored by the NHS and Department of Health to help ensure that adequate maternity and support services are available. Other organisations, such as the Multiple

Birth Foundation, who provide advice, information and support to multiple birth families and health professionals, use multiple birth statistics to monitor trends.

Statistics on home births are used by organisations such as Birth Choice UK, to help women decide where they might like to have their baby and promote women's rights to a home birth.

## 6. Planned changes to birth statistics

During May 2012, changes were made to the Population Statistics Act 1938, which means that information on the number of previous children and whether previously married is now collected from all mothers at birth registration and not just from married women. This will have an impact on a number of tables and [proposals for changes \(66.2 Kb Pdf\)](#) to outputs for 2012 and 2013 data were outlined on the ONS website in July 2012. Feedback from users was invited. No feedback was received and so the outlined changes are being implemented.

Changes to the tables included within [Live Births by socio-economic status of father](#) have also been considered, including implementing the [combined method for deriving the National Statistics Socio-economic classification](#) (using the higher NS-SEC of both parents rather than the NS-SEC of the father). [A proposal for changes to outputs for 2012 data \(63.5 Kb Pdf\)](#) was published on the ONS website in February 2013. Feedback from users was invited. No feedback was received so the outlined changes will be implemented.

## 7. Further information

This statistical bulletin provides supporting commentary for the '[Characteristics of birth 2](#)' package which includes data tables on births in England and Wales in 2012, by month and quarter of occurrence, multiple births and place of birth. Further information relating to the tables and this bulletin can be found on the metadata tab at the front of the data tables. The data file also contains information on the other birth statistics packages released throughout the year and provides links to these packages on the ONS website.

The '[Characteristics of birth 1](#)' package was published on 18 September 2013. This provides summary statistics on:

- stillbirths by age of parents and quarter of occurrence
- birthweight data for live and stillbirths by mother's area of usual residence
- maternities, live births, and stillbirths in hospitals by area of occurrence

Further packages providing 2012 birth statistics will be published on 5 December 2013. These packages are:

- Characteristics of mother 2, England and Wales
- Cohort fertility, England and Wales
- Further parental characteristics, England and Wales

Further publication dates are available on the [Publication Hub](#).

A [Quality and Methodology Information \(275.2 Kb Pdf\)](#) document for births provides information on statistical quality and the methods used to compile the data.

Further information on data quality, legislation and procedures relating to births is available in the [Births Metadata \(439.7 Kb Pdf\)](#).

An [interactive mapping tool](#) which enables trends in fertility to be analysed at the local level is available. The tool will be updated in Winter 2013/14 to include revised rates for 2002-2010 which take account of the 2011 Census and rates for 2011 and 2012.

For births data for other UK countries please see the [latest birth statistics for Northern Ireland](#) and the [latest birth statistics for Scotland](#).

International comparisons of live birth rates are available in the [Vital Statistics: Population and Health Reference Tables](#).

## 8. References

Department of Health (2007) [Maternity matters: Choice access and continuity of care in a safe service](#).

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (2013), accessed on 20 November 2013 [Multiple births and single embryo transfer review](#).

Nove A, Berrington A, Matthews Z (2008) [Home births in the UK, 1955-2006 \(819.1 Kb Pdf\)](#). Population Trends 133 pp 20-27.

Office for National Statistics (2011) [Live births, stillbirths and infant deaths: babies born in 2009 in England and Wales](#).

## 9. Background notes

1. There were 729,674 live births in England and Wales in 2012, compared with 723,913 in 2011, a rise of 0.8%. The rise in 2012 represents a continuation of the increasing numbers of live births recorded since 2001. During this period the number of live births has risen by 23% from 594,634 in 2001 despite a small fall between 2008 and 2009.
2. Birth figures are based on births occurring in the data year, but incorporate a small number of late registrations from births occurring in the previous year. More information can be found in the [births metadata \(439.7 Kb Pdf\)](#).
3. There is a large degree of comparability in birth statistics between countries within the UK. 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 the [Quality and Methodology Information \(275.2 Kb Pdf\)](#) document for births.
4. Statistics on home births show the number of women giving birth at home 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.
5. 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).

6. A list of the names of those given pre-publication access to the statistics and written commentary is available in [Pre-release Access List - Characteristics of Birth 2](#). The rules and principles which govern pre-release access are featured within the [Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order 2008](#).
7. Special extracts and tabulations of births data for England and Wales are available to order (subject to legal frameworks, disclosure control, resources and agreements of costs, where appropriate). Such enquiries should be made to:

Vital Statistics Outputs Branch Life Events and Population Sources Division Office for National Statistics  
Segensworth Road Titchfield Fareham Hampshire PO15 5RR

Tel: +44 (0)1329 444 110 E-mail: [vsob@ons.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:vsob@ons.gsi.gov.uk)

The ONS charging policy is available on the ONS website.

8. We would welcome feedback on the content, format and relevance of this release. Please send feedback to the postal or email address above.
9. Follow ONS on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).
10. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available by visiting [www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html](http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html) or from the Media Relations Office email: [media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk)

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- meet identified user needs
- are well explained and readily accessible
- are produced according to sound methods
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed.