



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

STATISTICS, DOCUMENT

Breastfeeding data: 2023

Data includes breastfeeding status at birth, 10 days, 6 to 8 weeks, and 6 months by local health board for 2023.

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Introduction

The purpose of this release is to provide a statistical overview of breastfeeding in Wales including analyses of mothers' characteristics. The data and analyses are used to inform [Welsh Government's maternity policy development](#) and the [All-Wales Breastfeeding Action Plan](#).

This release also provides data to support the [Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015](#) which states that every child in Wales should receive the best start in life.

Data in this release is sourced from Maternity Indicators dataset for mothers' intention to breastfeed and from the National Community Child Health Database (NCCHD) for breastfeeding at all other ages.

Complimentary statistics on [maternity and births were published on 31 July 2024](#).

Main points

- Breastfeeding rates in 2023 were the highest on record across all ages of the child, continuing longer term trends of increasing breastfeeding rates.
- 65% of babies were breastfed at birth in Wales in 2023.
- First-time mothers continued to report higher rates of intention to breastfeed than mothers who had previously given birth.
- Mothers aged 35 or older were most likely to breastfeed at birth in 2023 with their breastfeeding rate 30 percentage points higher than those aged under 20.
- The breastfeeding rate for children who were born at home was 11 percentage points higher than children born in hospital.

- Breastfeeding rates for Black children were highest at birth, 10 days, 6 weeks, and 6 months compared with any other ethnic group and breastfeeding rates for those from a White ethnic group were the lowest at all age points.

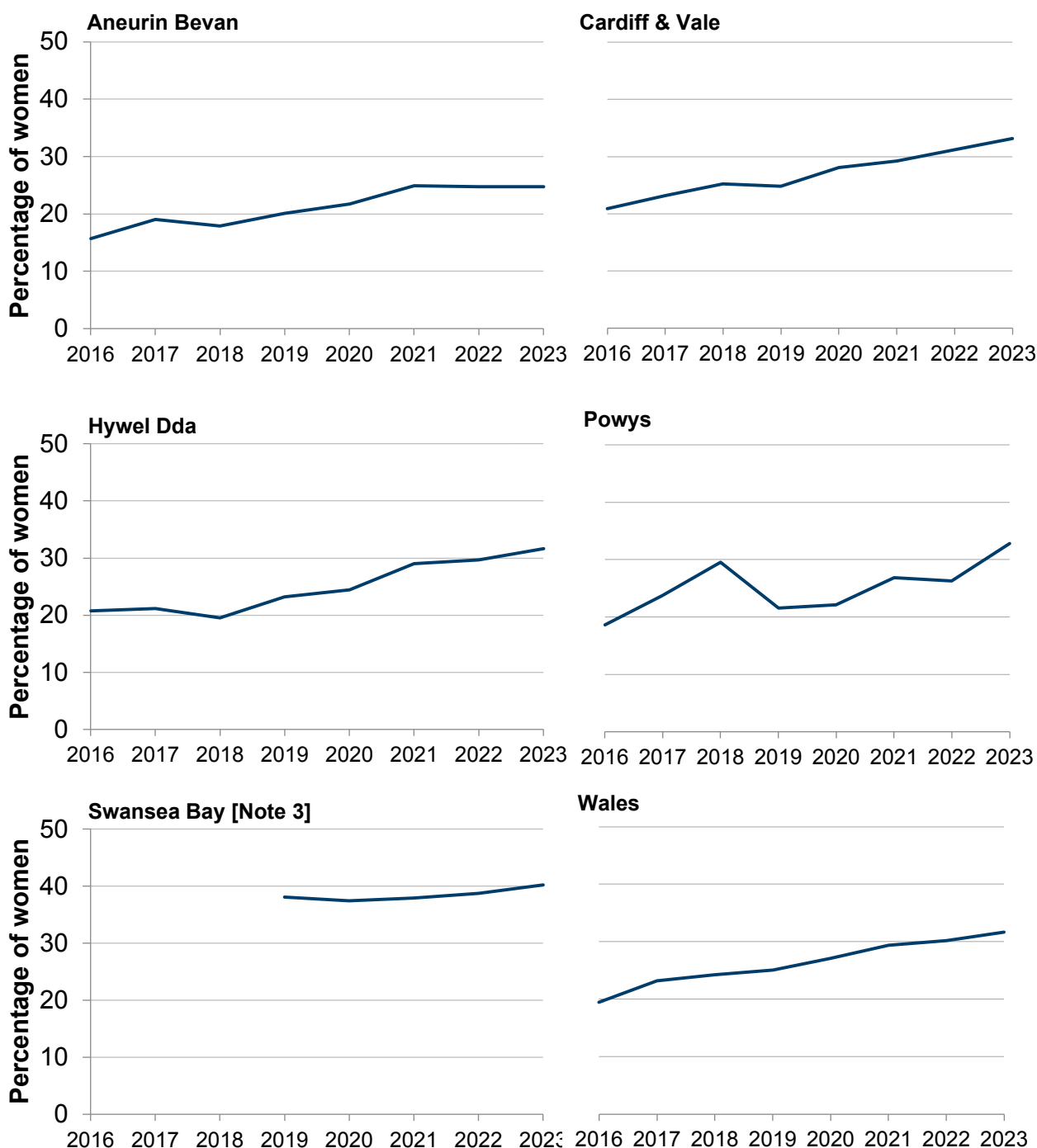
Breastfeeding and age of child

The Maternity Indicators dataset records a mother's intention to breastfeed prior to birth. Since this data refers to the mother, data presented refers to the 26,355 mothers who delivered in 2023, rather than children born in 2023.

Data for breastfeeding at birth and for babies turning 10 days, 6 weeks and 6 months are recorded in the NCCHD and refers to records where there was any breastfeeding. This includes babies fed exclusively breastmilk and those who were combination fed.

For breastfeeding at birth, the data refers to the 27,457 live births in 2023. For breastfeeding at the other age points, data refers to the babies who became the reference age in 2023: 27,376 babies turned 10 days, 27,229 turned 6 weeks, and 27,618 turned 6 months. Only records with a known breastfeeding status are recorded in the rate calculations.

Figure 1: Intention to breastfeed and breastfeeding at birth, 10 days, 6 weeks, 6 months, 2014 to 2023 [Note 1] [Note 2]



Description of Figure 1: Line chart showing that rates of breastfeeding at birth, 10 days, 6 weeks, 6 months, have all increased steadily over the past 7 or 8 years.

Source: MIDS, NCCHD

Breastfeeding by age of baby and health board on StatsWales

[Note 1] Percentages are of the total number of records with stated breastfeeding status (total number of records minus records with no stated breastfeeding status): In 2023 the percentage of records with no stated breastfeeding status was 1.8% at intention, 5.3% at birth, 8.5% at 10 days, 28.0% at 6 weeks and 31.9% at 6 months.

[Note 2] The denominator (total number of records) for percentage calculations at each point are: the number of women due to give birth for 'Intention to breastfeed'; all live births for 'birth'; and of babies turning the reference age for all other age points.

In 2023, breastfeeding rates were the highest on record at all ages.

66% of all mothers intended to breastfeed prior to giving birth. This percentage has remained broadly stable over the longer term and increased by 1.8 percentage points since the previous year.

Similarly, 65% of babies were breastfed at birth. The percentage has been on an upward trend over the longer term and is 3.6 percentage points higher than five years ago (62% in 2018), and 2.0 percentage points higher than 2022.

55% of babies were breastfed at 10 days. The percentage has been on an upward trend over the longer term and is 7.3 percentage points higher than five years ago (48.1% in 2018) and 2.9 percentage points higher than 2022.

41% babies were breastfed at 6 weeks. The percentage has been on an upward trend over the longer term and is also 6.4 percentage points higher than five years ago (34% in 2018) and 2.0 percentage points higher 2022.

29% of babies were breastfed at 6 months. The percentage has been on an

upward trend over the longer term and is also 6.5 percentage points higher than five years ago (22% in 2018) and 2.4 percentage points higher than 2022.

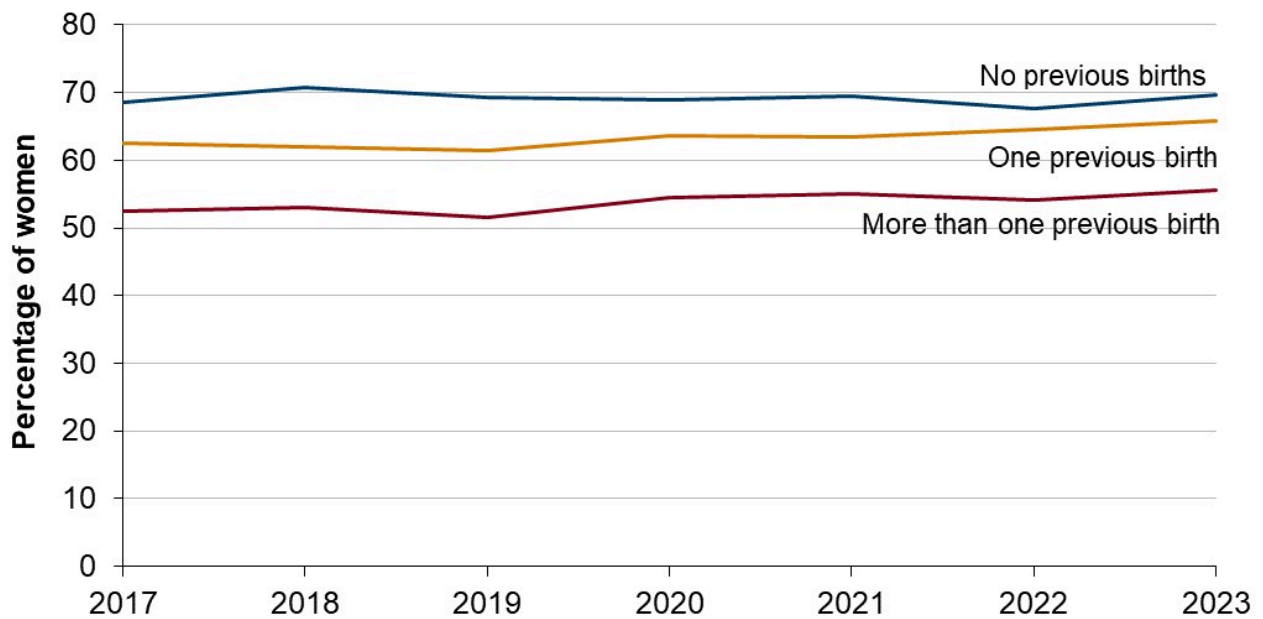
Breastfeeding data at all points in time are subject to data quality issues as some mothers and babies have incomplete records. Breastfeeding data after birth is collected when children have health visitor and GP appointments through the **Healthy Child Wales Programme**. If a child does not receive a contact, their breastfeeding data may be missing at that contact point.

In addition to annual data, **quarterly breastfeeding data with data completeness percentages are published on StatsWales, by local health board.**

Breastfeeding and parity

The MIDS records the number of times pregnant women have previously given birth (parity), which can be analysed with their intention to breastfeed.

Figure 2: Intention to breastfeed by number of times mothers had previously given birth (parity), 2017 to 2023 [Note 1]



Description of Figure 2: Line chart showing that intention to breastfeed has been higher for first time mothers throughout the time series. The percentage has been lowest for mothers who have had multiple previous births, throughout the time series.

Source: MIDS

[Intention to breastfeed by number of times mothers had previously given birth \(parity\) on StatsWales](#)

[Note 1] Percentages are of the total deliveries minus records with no stated breastfeeding status

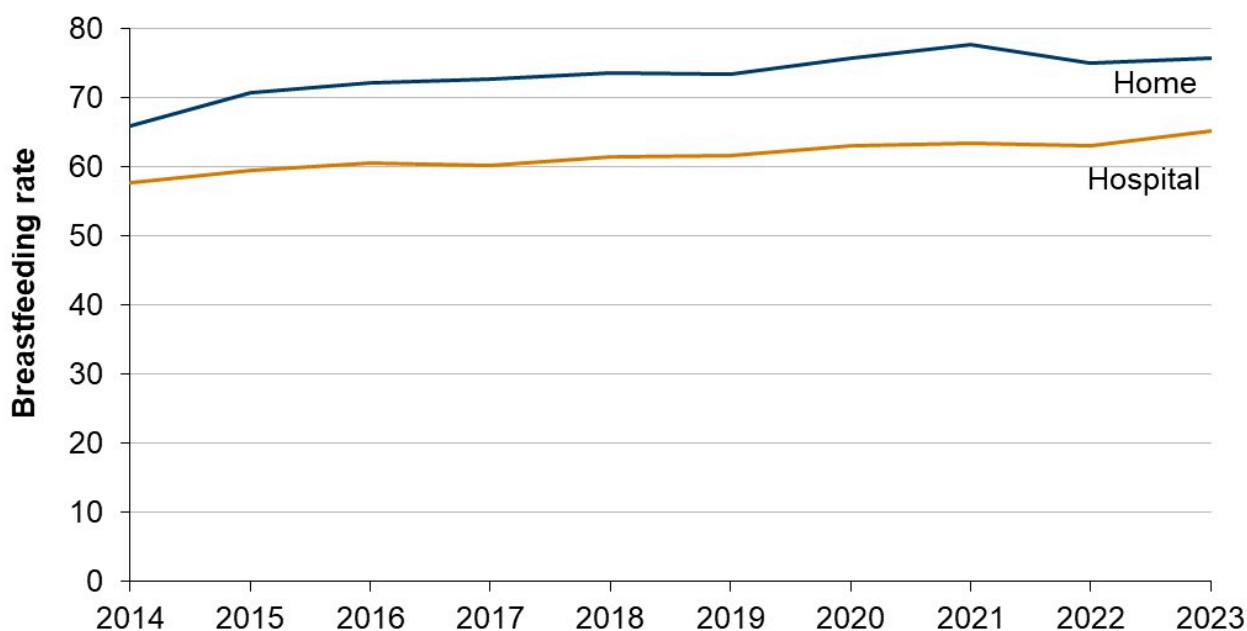
In 2023, 70% of first-time mothers (nulliparous) intended to breastfeed,

compared with 66% of mothers who had given birth once previously (primiparous), and 56% of mothers who had given birth more than once (multiparous).

The intention to breastfeed rate for nulliparous mothers has been broadly stable since 2017. The rate for primiparous mothers has been on slight upward trend over the past four years and increased by 1.4 percentage points in 2023 compared with 2022. The rate for multiparous mothers has remained broadly stable over the past 3 years and increased by 1.5 percentage points in 2023 compared with 2022.

Breastfeeding and place of birth

Figure 3: Percentage of live births breastfed at birth by place of birth, 2013 to 2023 [Note 1]



Description of Figure 3: Line chart showing that a higher percentage of babies

born at home were breastfed at birth compared with those born in hospital, but the percentage for both has increased at a similar rate over the past ten years.

Source: NCCHD

Breastfeeding at birth by place of birth and health board on StatsWales

[Note 1] Percentages are of the total live births minus births with no stated breastfeeding status at birth: 5.0% had no stated breastfeeding status for hospital births; 12.2% had no stated breastfeeding status at birth for home births in 2023.

In 2023, of the 467 babies born at home, 76% were breastfed at birth. This is an increase of 0.7 percentage points from the previous year and is 2.0 percentage points higher than five years ago.

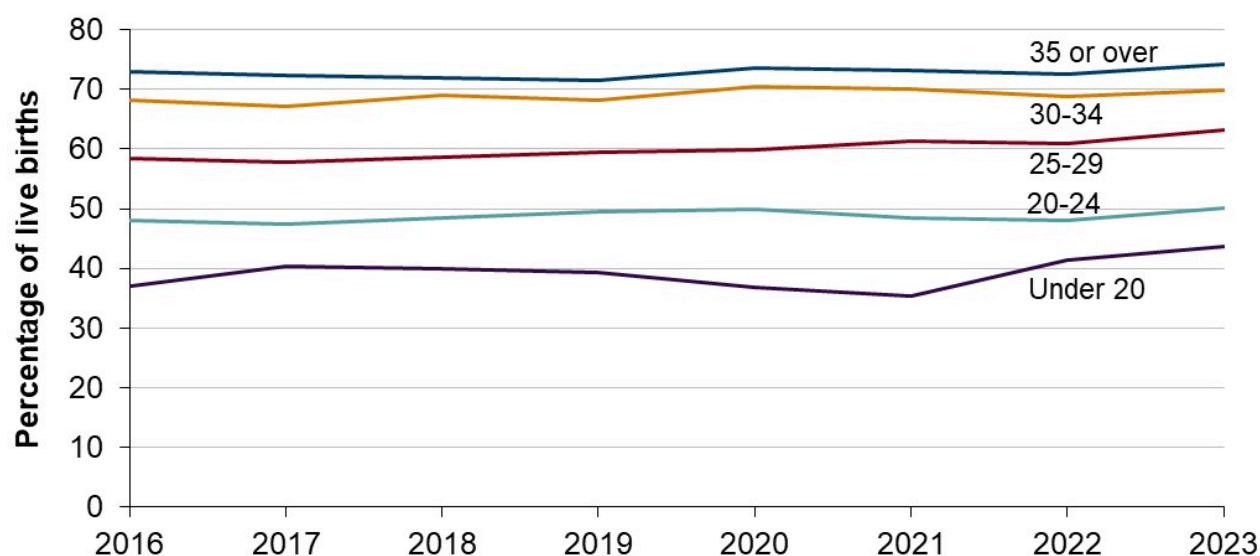
Of the 26,873 babies born in hospital, 65% were breastfed at birth. This is an increase of 2.1 percentage points from the previous year and is the highest on record.

Additionally, in 2023, 54 babies' place of birth was recorded as 'born in transit', while 63 had no stated place of birth.

Breastfeeding data for babies born in Neonatal Units (born at less than 33 weeks gestation) is published in the **National Neonatal Audit Programme (NNAP) 2022 Annual Report (Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health)**, and shows that for 2022, 58% of babies born under 33 weeks in Welsh Neonatal Units were discharged from the units having received some breast milk.

Breastfeeding and age of mother

Figure 4: Breastfeeding at birth by mothers' age group, 2016 to 2023 [Note 1]



Description of Figure 4: Line chart showing breastfeeding rates at birth in older mother's age groups has been consistently higher than in younger mother's age groups. Rates in most mother's age groups have remained broadly similar since 2016, with slight upward trends in mothers aged under 20 and mothers aged 25 to 29.

Source: NCCHD

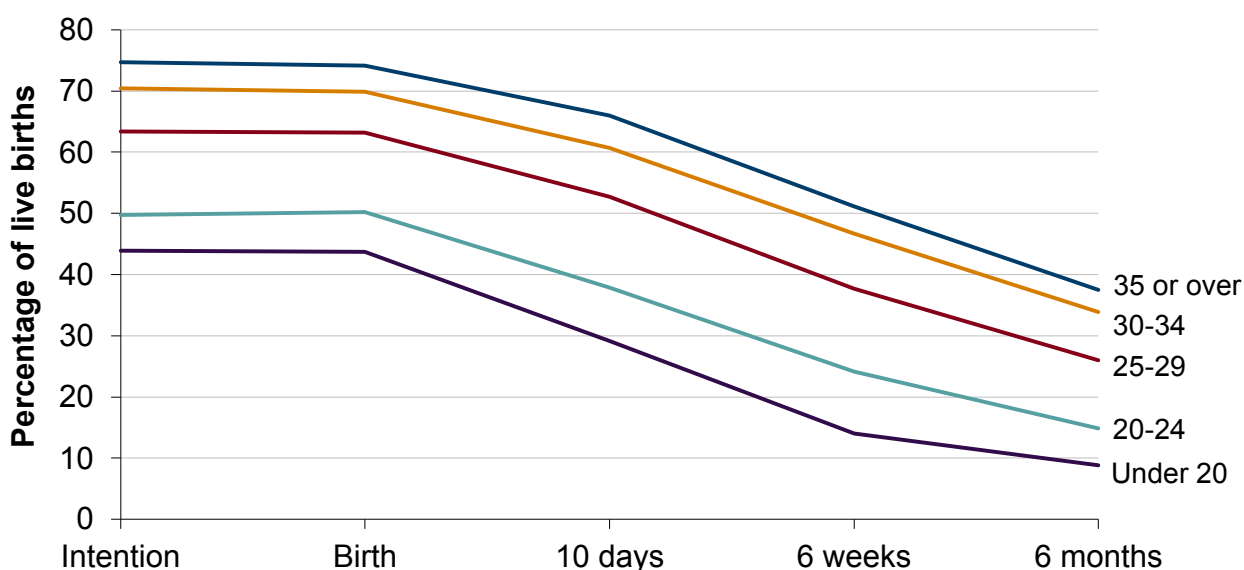
Breastfeeding by age of baby and age of mother on StatsWales

[Note 1] Percentages are of the total births minus births with no stated breastfeeding status at birth

In 2023, 74% babies whose mother was aged 35 or older were breastfed. The

rate decreased in each mother's age category, where 63% babies were breastfed where the mother was aged 25 to 29, and 44% babies were breastfed where the mother was under 20.

Figure 5: Breastfeeding by mothers' age group and age of baby, Wales, 2023 [Note 1]



Description of Figure 5: Line chart showing that while breastfeeding rates were higher in the older age groups, the reduction in breastfeeding rates as the child gets older is similar across all age groups.

Source: MIDS, NCCHD

Breastfeeding by age of baby and age of mother on StatsWales

[Note 1] Percentages are of the total records minus records with no stated breastfeeding status: In 2023 the percentage of records with no breastfeeding status was 1.8% at intention, 5.3% at birth, 8.5% at 10 days, 28.0% at 6 weeks and 31.9% at 6 months.

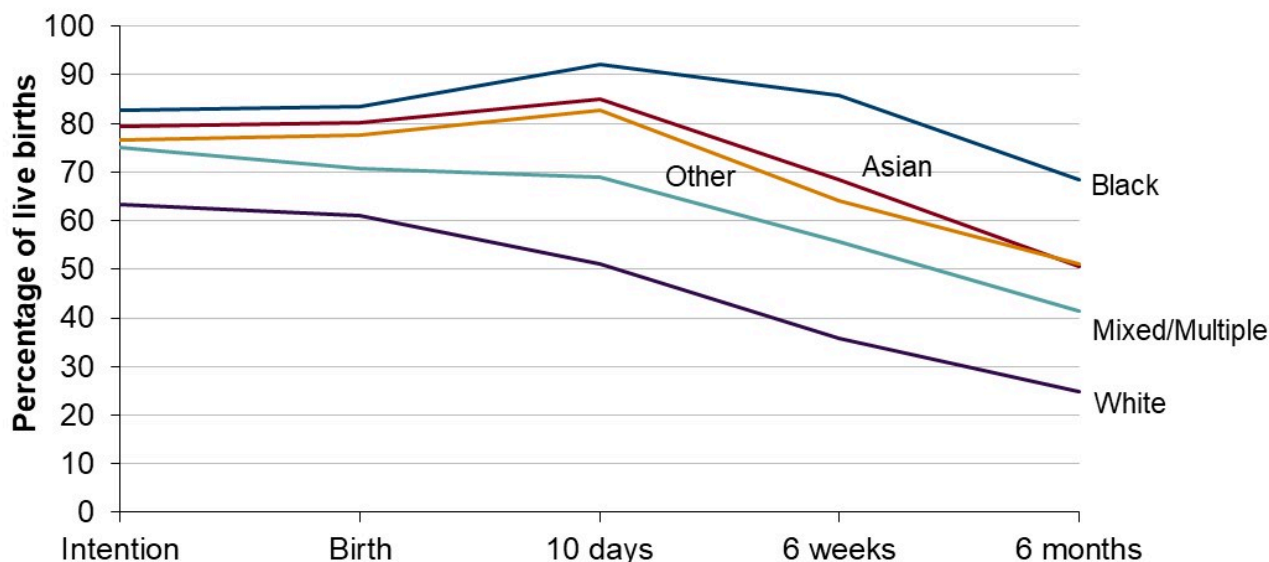
Breastfeeding rates decreased across all mother's age categories as the age of the child increased. The rate in decrease in breastfeeding varied considerably across mother's age groups between birth and 10 days where Mothers aged 35 and over decreased by 8 percentage points and mothers aged under 20 decreased by 15 percentage points.

The decrease in breastfeeding rates was more consistent across mother's age groups between 10 days and 6 weeks, where rates decreased by 14 or 15 percentage points for all age groups.

Breastfeeding and ethnic group

Figure 6 shows how breastfeeding rates differ between ethnic groups. Intention to breastfeed is based on the ethnic group of the mother, whereas breastfeeding rates at other points in time refer to the ethnic group of the baby.

Figure 6: Breastfeeding by ethnic group [Note 1] and age of baby, Wales, 2023 [Note 2]



Description of Figure 6: Line chart showing that breastfeeding rates were higher for people of Black, Asian or Other ethnicities. The rates at which breastfeeding changed with the age of the child were different by ethnic group.

Source: MIDS, NCCHD

Breastfeeding by age of baby and ethnic group on StatsWales

[Note 1] Definitions of ethnic groups are provided in the [quality report](#).

[Note 2] Percentages are of the total records minus records with no stated breastfeeding status: In 2023 the percentage of records with no breastfeeding status was 1.8% at intention, 5.3% at birth, 8.5% at 10 days, 28.0% at 6 weeks and 31.9% at 6 months.

Breastfeeding rates in the Black ethnic group were higher than any other ethnic group for all children's age points from birth to 6 months. Black mothers had the

highest intention to breastfeed at 83% then 92% of Black children were breastfed at age 10 days, 86% at 6 weeks, and 69% of black children were breastfed at age 6 months.

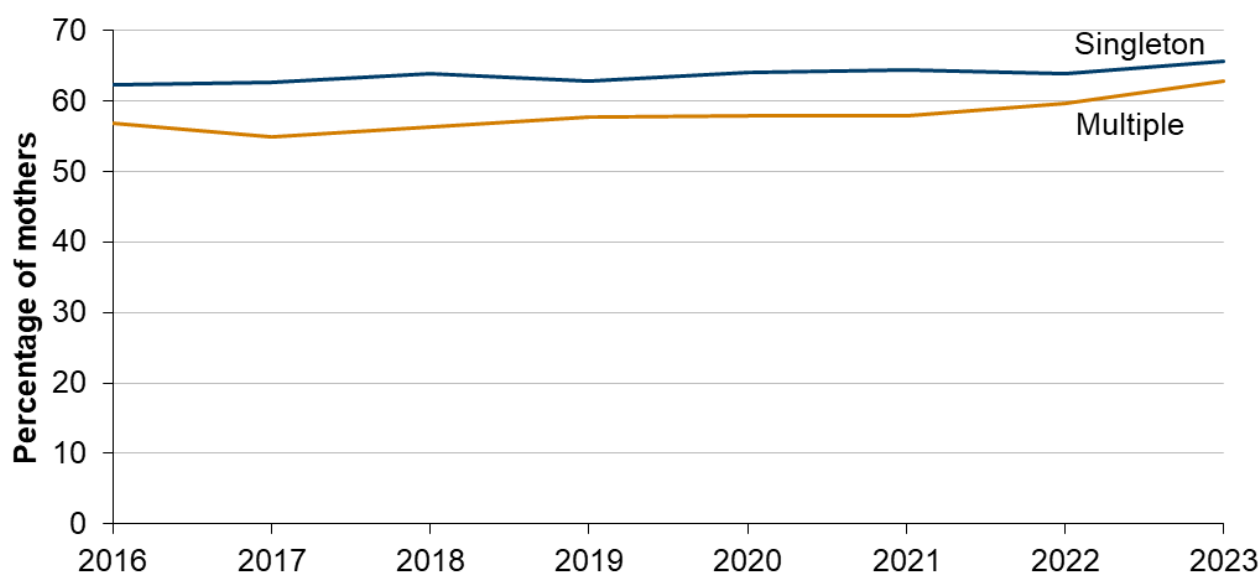
The trend for Asian and Other ethnic groups was similar at all children's age points. Asian and other mothers had high intentions to breastfeed with rates of 79% and 77% respectively. This breastfeeding rate dropped to 68% for Asian and 64% for the Other ethnic group children at 6 weeks. This breastfeeding rate continued to decrease further at 6 months to 51% for the Other ethnic group children and 51% for Asian children.

75% of mothers of Mixed or multiple ethnicities intended to breastfeed, and a slightly lower proportion of Mixed or multiple ethnicity children were breastfed at birth (71%). The breastfeeding rate decreased at all age points after birth, and 41% of children from Mixed or multiple ethnicities breastfed at 6 months.

Breastfeeding rates for the White ethnic group were lower than any other ethnic group at all points at which data was collected. 63% of mothers intended to breastfeed but a slightly lower proportion (61%) were breastfed at birth. The rate decreased to around half of White children breastfed at age 10 days (51%), a third (36%) breastfed at age 6 weeks, and around a quarter (25%) breastfed at age 6 months.

Breastfeeding and number of babies

Figure 7: Intention to breastfeed by number of babies, Wales, 2016-2023 [Note 1] [Note 2]



Description of Figure 7: Line chart showing a slightly higher percentage of mothers of singleton babies intended to breastfeed compared with mothers of multiple babies since 2016. The percentage has increased over time for the multiple group but has been broadly stable for the singleton group.

Source: MIDS

[Intention to breastfeed by number of babies on StatsWales](#)

[Note 1] Percentages are of the total records minus records with no stated breastfeeding status

[Note 2] Singleton refers to a single baby born; multiple refers to twins, triplets or more babies born through a single pregnancy.

66% of mothers who gave birth to one baby intended to breastfeed in 2023. This is 1.8 percentage points higher than the previous year and 1.8 percentage points higher than the rate five years ago.

63% of mothers who gave birth to multiple children (twins, triplets or quadruplets) intended to breastfeed in 2023. This is 3.1 percentage points higher than the previous year and 6.4 percentage points higher than the rate five years ago.

Breastfeeding and deprivation

Mothers in the most deprived areas were less likely to breastfeed than those in the least deprived areas. 54% of mothers in the most deprived areas in 2023 breastfed at birth compared with 76% of mothers in the least deprived areas in 2023.

Breastfeeding rates at birth within each quintile of deprivation have remained relatively stable since 2019. However there has been an increase of over 4 percentage points in breastfeeding rates at birth in the most deprived areas from 29% in 2019 to 54% in 2023. Comparatively there was an increase of 1.6 percentage points over the same time period for those in the least deprived areas.

[Breastfeeding at birth by type of breastfeeding and Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation quintile on StatsWales](#)

Quality and methodology information

All data used in this release is published on [StatsWales](#) and more detailed

information on the sources of data and analyses in this statistical release are provided in the [quality report](#).

Quality of specific data items

Not all records on the Maternity Indicators data set and the National Community Child Health Database have complete records for breastfeeding status. The completeness rate decreases with the age of the baby and in 2023, was as follows: 98.2% for intention to breastfeed; 94.7% at birth; 91.5% at 10 days; 72.0% at six weeks; and 68.1% at 6 months.

A completeness table for all data items used in this release from both data sources is available in the [quality report](#).

Statement of compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics

Our statistical practice is regulated by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR). OSR sets the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the Code of Practice for Statistics that all producers of official statistics should adhere to.

All of our statistics are produced and published in accordance with a number of statements and protocols to enhance trustworthiness, quality and value. These are set out in the Welsh Government's [Statement of Compliance](#).

These [accredited official statistics \(OSR\)](#) demonstrate the standards expected around trustworthiness, quality and public value in the following ways.

Trustworthiness

The data used in this statistical release is collected via two sources, the NCCHD and the MIDS. The NCCHD consists of anonymised records for all children born, resident or treated in Wales and born after 1987. It brings together data from the child health system databases which are held by local health boards. This is a long-established data collection and database. The MIDS combines a child's birth record with their mother's initial assessment record (where possible). There are some data quality issues with certain data items in this dataset which are explained in more detail in the [quality report](#).

Quality

The published figures provided are compiled by professional analysts using the latest available data and applying methods using their professional judgement and analytical skillset. Statistics published by Welsh Government adhere to the Statistical Quality Management Strategy which supplements the Quality pillar of the Code of Practice for Statistics and the European Statistical System principles of quality for statistical outputs.

The NCCHD data included in this release comes from administrative data collection forms which are used in the management of the Healthy Child Wales Programme. The data is dependent on local authorities maintaining accurate records but systems are well established and reliable.

Data is collected by Digital Health Care Wales directly from local health boards via local Child Health Systems.

Validation checks are performed by Welsh Government statisticians and queries referred to local health boards where necessary. The statistical release is then drafted, signed off by senior statisticians and is published in line with statement

on confidentiality and data access which is informed by the trustworthiness pillar contained in the Code of Practice for Statistics.

Value

The purpose of the statistical release is to provide evidence for policy development; to allow local health boards to monitor and benchmark their service provision against all other local health boards in Wales; and to inform for the wider public about breastfeeding rates in Wales. This annual statistical release also supports the Welsh Government's long-term plan for health and social care: [A Healthier Wales](#).

You are welcome to contact us directly with any comments about how we meet these standards. Alternatively, you can contact OSR by emailing regulation@statistics.gov.uk or via the OSR website.

Well-being of Future Generations Act (WFG)

The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales. The Act puts in place seven wellbeing goals for Wales. These are for a more equal, prosperous, resilient, healthier and globally responsible Wales, with cohesive communities and a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language. Under section (10)(1) of the Act, the Welsh Ministers must (a) publish indicators (“national indicators”) that must be applied for the purpose of measuring progress towards the achievement of the wellbeing goals, and (b) lay a copy of the national indicators before Senedd Cymru. Under section 10(8) of the Well-being of Future Generations Act, where the Welsh Ministers revise the national indicators, they must as soon as reasonably practicable (a) publish the indicators as revised and (b) lay a copy of them before the Senedd. These national indicators were laid before the Senedd in 2021. The indicators laid on 14 December 2021 replace the set laid

on 16 March 2016.

Information on the indicators, along with narratives for each of the wellbeing goals and associated technical information is available in the [Wellbeing of Wales report](#).

Further information on the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#).

The statistics included in this release could also provide supporting narrative to the national indicators and be used by public services boards in relation to their local wellbeing assessments and local wellbeing plans.

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