
Born In Wales: Newsletter 1

Born in Wales is a birth cohort study working with Public Health Wales, Children In Wales, schools and others to help improve health, education and wellbeing for all children in Wales.

We want to improve understanding of how best to support families to give children the best start in life and that starts with being a good weight at birth and being ready to play, learn, have fun and make friends when starting school.



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Being small for age at birth

What we already know

Babies are more likely to be born smaller than they should be if :

- They have been exposed to toxic substances like cigarette smoke or drugs.
- They have not received enough nutrition and their mum is underweight or very young herself, or has low iron in her blood or gum disease.
- Their mum has had a baby less than 5 months ago.

What can be done?

Lots can be done to help make sure babies are the right weight for their age. This includes programmes to help addiction and support women to stop smoking or using drugs, programmes for teenage parents and support to improve diet for expectant mums and the whole family.

However, these programmes are only available in certain areas in Wales - so not all families can benefit. How can we reach and engage with the many families that are missing out or not engaging with this support?

We also know there are other things which affect the baby in pregnancy but need more information to really understand them. For example what effect does stress or worry have? (e.g. around COVID and job stresses), what support do families need if one or both parents lives with a chronic condition?

Being ready for school

What we already know

Children who are ready for school do better in school. They enjoy school, have friends and learn better and so do better throughout school.

The children who are more likely to be ready for school :

- live in an area with good childcare provision
- are breastfed
- their parents are in good physical and mental health and they were born a healthy birth weight
- their parents have a nurturing parenting style.

However, many of these things start from birth, an occupation with shift work may mean a mum cannot breastfeed her baby or if a parent works away there are less adults in the household to play and talk with the baby. What support is needed to help families be able to help their children learn and develop in the first years of life? How do we best support children to grow up confident, enjoy life and be happy into their future?

Early findings from first 100+ women

COVID

12 in 100 women report having had COVID symptoms (their main symptoms were cough, fatigue, shortness of breath, fever).



Wellbeing

6 in 10 report periods of low mood, this included feeling down and depressed, with 45 in 100 reporting to worry a lot and 5 in 10 saying they have had bad stress. The sources of stress are mainly COVID related and include financial problems and someone close being very ill.

Breastfeeding

44 women in 100 intend to breastfeed only, 14 in 100 intend to use only a bottle and 34 in 100 intend to use a combination of bottle and breast (4 in 100 don't know).

Experience during this pregnancy:

The experience of this pregnancy has been very varied with the majority (7 in 10) of women reporting a negative experience especially feeling 'isolated', 'alone', 'lonely', 'distant', not supported' with the majority wanting their partners to be able to attend appointments, for example:

"Confusing & stressful... they speak very fast and with a mask on I can't lip read. I find myself constantly asking to repeat or explain things but then I feel as though I'm wasting their time or annoying them. Also, not being able to have my partner in appointments has been very upsetting".

However, some women have reported changes due to COVID as a positive experience:

"This has actually been the best possible time I could have ever gotten pregnant as I usually hate hospitals, hate crowds generally don't like people etc the midwives and all other support have been amazing".

Resources of help and support in pregnancy

The NHS Pregnancy and baby guide. :Whatever you want to know about getting pregnant, being pregnant or caring for your new baby, you should find it here.

Public Health Wales guide for pregnant women and new parents

Tommys : Tommy's provides accredited midwife-led pregnancy health information for parents-to-be.

Family Action : providing practical, emotional and financial support to those who are experiencing poverty, disadvantage and social isolation across the country. We strengthen families and communities, build skills and resilience and improve the life chances of children and adults.

MIND: We provide advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem. We campaign to improve services, raise awareness and promote understanding.