Infant Feeding Statistics Scotland
Financial Year of Birth 2017/18
A National Statistics publication for Scotland

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About this release
This release by Information Services Division (ISD) provides an update of infant feeding statistics including data for babies born in the financial year 2017/18.

Encouraging and supporting breastfeeding is an important public health activity. There is good evidence that breastfeeding protects the health of children and mothers. Breastfeeding rates in Scotland are monitored and published annually. The information is collected at Health Visitor reviews of children at around 10-14 days (First Visit) and 6-8 weeks of age.

Main Points

- Sixty four percent of babies born in Scotland in 2017/18 were ever breastfed (that is, breastfed for any length of time after their birth).
- Breastfeeding rates in Scotland are increasing. More than half (51%) of babies were breastfed at First Visit in 2017/18, this has increased from 44% of babies born in 2001/02.

The proportion of babies being breastfed at 6-8 weeks of age has increased from 36% of babies born in 2001/02 to 42% of babies born in 2017/18. However, breastfeeding rates in Scotland remain low compared to those seen in other countries, and fall far short of recommended levels.
Breastfeeding is much more common among older mothers, and those from less deprived areas of Scotland.

White Scottish babies are less likely to be breastfed than babies from any other ethnic group.

In general, breastfeeding rates are higher in the East and North of Scotland, and lower in the West and South.

Background

Breastfeeding provides the best nutrition for babies and young children and supports children’s health in the short and longer term. Current guidance recommends that babies should receive just breast milk for the first 6 months of life, then, after introduction of solid foods, should continue to breastfeed up to their second birthday or for as long as the mother and baby wish.

There is strong evidence that breastfeeding reduces children’s risk of gut, chest, and ear infections and leads to a small but significant improvement in brain development and IQ. Breastfeeding also benefits mothers’ health, with strong evidence that it reduces the risk of breast and ovarian cancer, and some evidence that it may also promote maternal healthy weight and reduce the risk of Type 2 diabetes. The benefits of breastfeeding for both baby and mother are seen across the world, including in high income countries such as Scotland.

Improving breastfeeding rates in Scotland would help to improve the health of babies and mothers, and reduce inequalities in health.

There is good evidence that interventions can work to improve breastfeeding rates. Overall, it is likely that comprehensive approaches that consider a wide range of issues will be most effective. Interventions within the health service, such as ensuring the availability and quality of breastfeeding support for new mothers, are important. Equally, wider interventions, such as influencing public attitudes to breastfeeding, restricting the inappropriate promotion of formula milk, and ensuring supportive employment policies that allow women to continue to breastfeed after returning to work, will also be required.

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Further Information

Find out more in the Infant Feeding Statistics Financial Year 2017/18 report, and in the accompanying interactive data visualisation. Background information can be found in the technical report. Summary data tables and detailed open data tables are also available. The next release of this publication will be in October 2019.