

# How healthy are children and young people in England?

HEALTH INDICATORS

The Association of Public Health Observatories (APHO) collected information and statistics to see how children and young people's health varied according to the area they live in as well as other factors, like poverty. The research compares the health of children and young people living in different parts of England with those living in other European countries.

The Young Person's Reference Group\* (YPRG) on public health has picked out the issues from the APHO report that **they** think are important to young people today. Here are some of the facts and figures that they think **you** might find interesting...

For example, did you know that if you live in the richest areas of England you can expect to live between three and four years longer than those who live in the poorest areas?

People in the North East and North West of England have the lowest life expectancy. People in the South West live the longest.

## What does the APHO report say about the things that matter most to young people?

Alcohol

Smoking

Obesity

Teenage pregnancy

Road safety

### \*What is the Young Person's Reference Group, anyway?

It's a group of 12 young people aged between 11 and 18 who meet up three or four times a year to discuss research on public health issues. The group is linked to a network of researchers in various UK universities. For more information, contact [research@ncb.org.uk](mailto:research@ncb.org.uk)

## Alcohol misuse has serious health and social consequences.

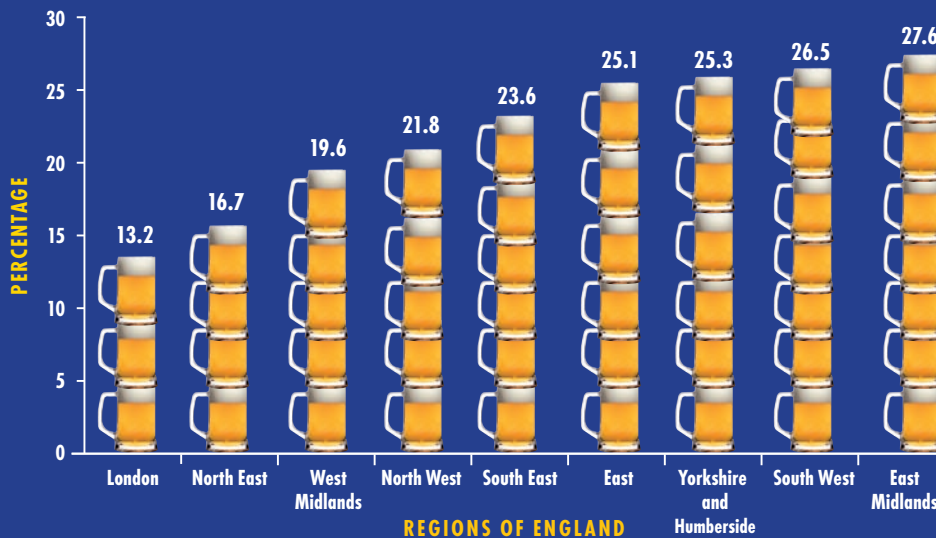
Evidence shows alcohol has major effects on crime and anti-social behaviour, including theft, assault, selling illegal drugs, accidents, unprotected sex and unplanned pregnancy.

Studies in the USA have shown that children and young people who began drinking before the age of 15 were **four times** more likely to become dependent on alcohol than those who began drinking at the age of 21.

**Britain has the highest percentage of children and young people consuming alcohol in the world. Why do children and young people drink so much alcohol in Britain?**

On average, 22% of young people aged 13–15 reported drinking alcohol in the previous seven days; that's more than one young person in five. One survey in 2003, of young people aged 15–16 in the UK, showed that one-quarter admitted being drunk on 10 or more occasions in a one-year period. **What more should be done to educate children and young people about the dangers of alcohol misuse?**

The graph shows the percentage of 13- to 15-year-olds drinking an alcoholic drink in the last week by regions across England. There's quite a difference between London, where it's about one in eight young people, and the East Midlands, where it's more than one in four. **Where do you live? How does your area compare?**



## Smoking is the greatest cause of avoidable illness and early death in the UK.

**The younger people start to smoke, the more likely they are to smoke for longer and to die from smoking. For example, someone who starts smoking at the age of 15 is three times more likely to die of cancer due to smoking than someone who starts in their mid-20s. Most children and young people know that smoking is dangerous, so why do so many smoke?**

Children and young people living in households with other smokers are more likely to take up smoking themselves. The more smokers there are in your household, the more likely you are to become a smoker yourself (as well as being at risk from second-hand smoke). Children and young people living in the North of England are most likely to be living with smokers.

In 2004, nearly one in 10 children and young people aged 11–15 was a regular smoker. In 14- and 15-year-olds, smoking is more common in girls (10% regular smokers) than boys (7%). **Why do more girls smoke than boys?**

Despite government policies and targets to reduce smoking by children and young people, research suggests that there has been no real change since 1999. **What could be done to prevent children and young people from smoking? Is a new approach needed?**

Who ate all the pies?



## Obesity—Are young people in England really becoming heavier?

Reducing the growing numbers of obese children and young people is a priority for the government.

**If the number of obese children and young people continues to increase, then children and young people will have a shorter life expectancy than their parents**

Although there is much argument about how to measure obesity, it is estimated that obesity among children aged 2–10 years has increased from 10% to 14% between 1995 and 2004. Although numbers of obese children are rising across Europe, children in England are more likely to be obese than those living in Spain, Poland, France, Netherlands, Germany and the Czech Republic, and the rate of obesity is rising.

**QUIZ QUESTION 1:** Which European country has the highest rate of obesity in those aged 13? (Answers on last page)

Getting children and young people to increase the amount of physical exercise they do each week is a government priority, as exercise helps children and young people to develop both physically and mentally. Despite the benefits of exercise, one-third of boys and between one-third and one-half of girls in England do not do the recommended amount of physical activity.

**What would encourage young people to do more exercise, especially girls?**

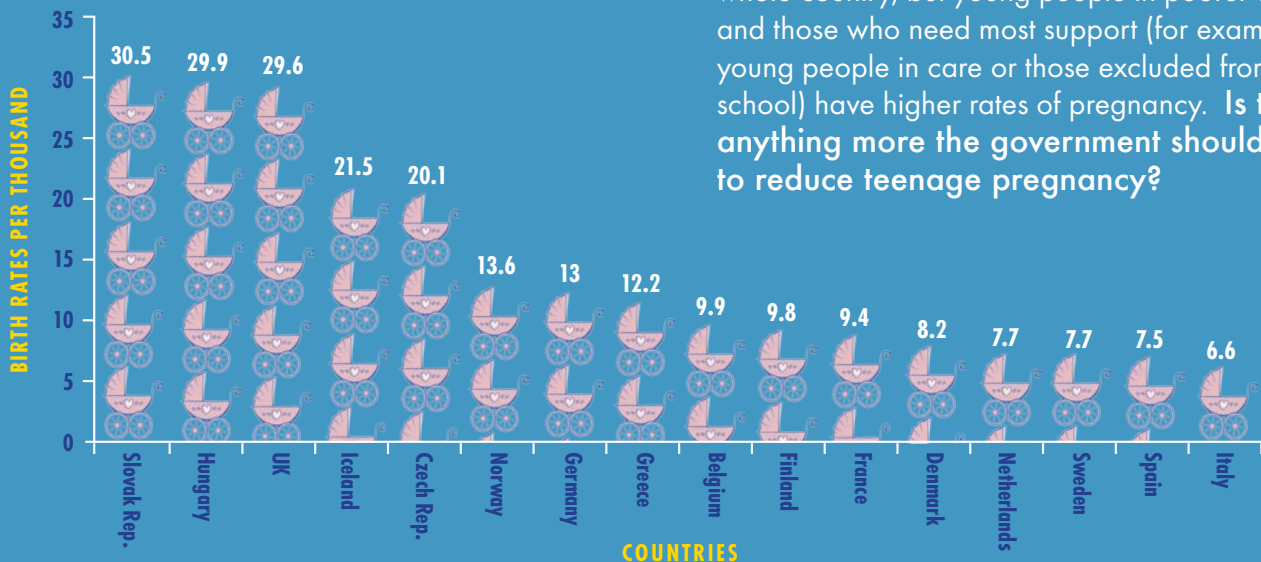
By the age of 15, only 50% of girls report that they take the recommended 60 minutes of moderate exercise per day. But compared to many other European countries, children in England are more physically active. For example, boys in England aged 13 were reported to be fourth most physically active of the European countries and English girls were the fifth most active.

**QUIZ QUESTION 2:** In which European countries are 13-year-old boys and girls most physically active? (Answers on last page)

## How many young women under the age of 18 get pregnant?

In England, there are around 40,000 pregnancies a year in girls aged under 18 (around 42 in 1,000 young women aged 15–17). This is higher than other countries in Western Europe. The graph below shows the number of births per 1,000 young women aged 15–17 across Europe in 1996.

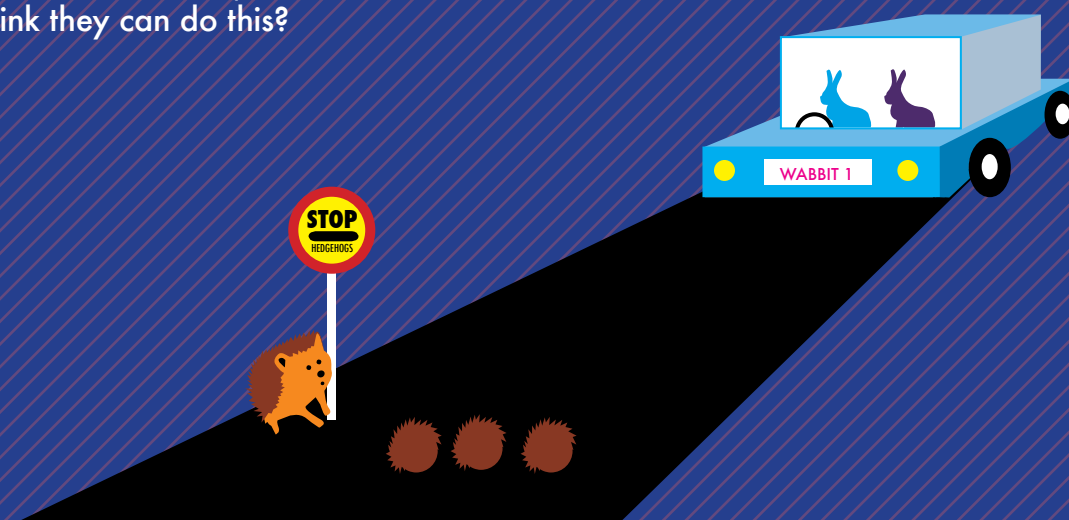
The government is trying to tackle teenage pregnancy through a media campaign to help young people resist peer pressure, by improving sex education and by providing more contraceptive services and better support for teenage parents. Teenage pregnancy affects the whole country, but young people in poorer areas and those who need most support (for example, young people in care or those excluded from school) have higher rates of pregnancy. **Is there anything more the government should do to reduce teenage pregnancy?**



## Road safety

One area where England compares well with other European countries is road safety: fewer children and young people are killed or injured in road traffic accidents than in most other European countries. Even though there is more traffic on the roads these days, the number of children and young people being injured has gone down, although this may be because children and young people are less likely to walk or cycle than previous generations. The government wants to improve the situation further, by halving the number of children and young people killed or seriously injured in road accidents by 2010. **How do you think they can do this?**

Even though the numbers of deaths and injuries have been going down steadily for a number of years, road accidents are **still** a leading cause of death for children and young people. **For young people aged 15–19, three in 10 of all deaths are caused by road traffic accidents.** Of these accidents, three-quarters are due to deaths where a child or young person was the driver or passenger in a car. **Is this because young people are not safe drivers?**



## What will happen with all the information in the APHO report?

The data will be used by the government and people who provide services to children and young people so that they can target help and support to the people who need it most.

### Quiz answers:

Q1: Malta

Q2: Countries with the most physically active boys aged 13 were:

1: Ireland, 2: Czech Republic, 3: Austria, 4: **England**

Countries with the most physically active girls aged 13 were:

1: Ireland, 2: Netherlands, 3: Czech Republic, 4: Austria,  
5: **England.**

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For further information please visit the Yorkshire and Humber Public Health Observatory's website at [www.yhpho.org.uk](http://www.yhpho.org.uk) or contact the Chair of the Association of PHOs, Brian Ferguson, by emailing [baf3@york.ac.uk](mailto:baf3@york.ac.uk)