

Statistics Relating to Home Births

This page describes how statistics relating to home births may be produced from the information which is collected when a birth is registered.

It should be noted that the only figures the National Records of Scotland (NRS) can produce may not be defined in precisely the way that some of the people interested in the number of home births would wish.

In particular, as no information is collected, when the birth is registered, about where the mother wanted to have her baby, NRS cannot distinguish between births which were planned to take place in the mother's home and cases where the mother wanted to have the baby in hospital but unexpectedly gave birth at home.

Among the information collected when a birth is registered is the address of the place where the baby was born. Because of the possibility of variation in the way in which the name and address of a given hospital (or any other institution) is recorded when different births are registered, special codes are allocated to identify each such institution. The final character of this 'institution' code indicates the type of institution (e.g., 'H' for 'Hospital'). The statistical data records for births which did not take place in an institution all have an 'institution' code which ends in 'N' (for 'Non-institution'). This is sometimes used to produce statistics of what NRS describes as 'non-institution' births. As well as home births, such figures will also include births which took place in (e.g.) hotels, car parks, and the houses of other family members.

For the purpose of producing statistics of home births from the information which is held in NRS's database, the following definition should exclude almost all the births which occur elsewhere:

- the final character of the 'institution' code is 'N' (i.e., the birth did not take place in an institution);
- the postcode of the mother's usual residence is the same as the postcode of the place of birth (in order to exclude births which took place in, say, the house of another family member); and
- the mother's country of residence is Scotland (this condition is necessary because, for mothers who are not resident in Scotland, the value in the NRS statistical database's field for the postcode of the mother's usual residence may actually be the postcode of the place of birth. This is done so that, when NRS produces statistics for areas within Scotland, it counts births to mothers who are not resident in Scotland on the basis of where the births occurred. NRS produces its statistics of births to mothers who are not resident in Scotland by using the database's separate code for the mother's country of residence.)

However, this definition may not produce absolutely accurate figures for home births. It will include any cases where a mother gave birth in another home within the same postcode, and exclude cases where a woman chose (or had) to give birth in someone else's home that was in a different postcode. As mentioned earlier, NRS does not have any information about whether or not the birth was planned to take place at home.