



**Growing Up
in Ireland**
National Longitudinal
Study of Children

GROWING UP IN IRELAND

KEY FINDINGS: INFANT COHORT (at 9 months)

NO. 2 INFANT HEALTH

INTRODUCTION

This is the second in a series of *Key Findings* from the first wave of the Infant Cohort in *Growing Up in Ireland*. The data were collected when the Study Children were nine months of age. Just over 11,100 children and their families were recruited into the project, from the national population of almost 73,700 nine-month-olds.

The foundations of a child's health are established early in life and it has been clearly established that the quality of an infant's health has a substantial impact on development and health over the entire life-course. In *Growing Up in Ireland*, the infant's health outcomes at nine months were assessed by measuring the infant's length, weight and head circumference, and by recording details on the child's health history and current health status from his/her mother. Information was also gathered on the infant's experience of illness and health-service use.



MOST INFANTS REPORTED TO BE IN GOOD HEALTH AT BIRTH AND AT NINE MONTHS

Mothers in the Study were asked to report on the health of their children at birth and at nine months.

- Most mothers reported their infant at birth to be either *very healthy* (80%) or *healthy with a few minor problems* (17%) – Figure 1.
- Most mothers also reported their infant to be either *very healthy* (83%) or *healthy with a few minor problems* (16%) at nine months of age – Figure 1.
- Reports of infant health at nine months varied by gender: boys (1.4%) were significantly more likely than girls (0.8%) to be reported as being *sometimes* or *often unwell* – Figure 2.

Figure 1: Mothers' perception of infants' health at birth and at nine months

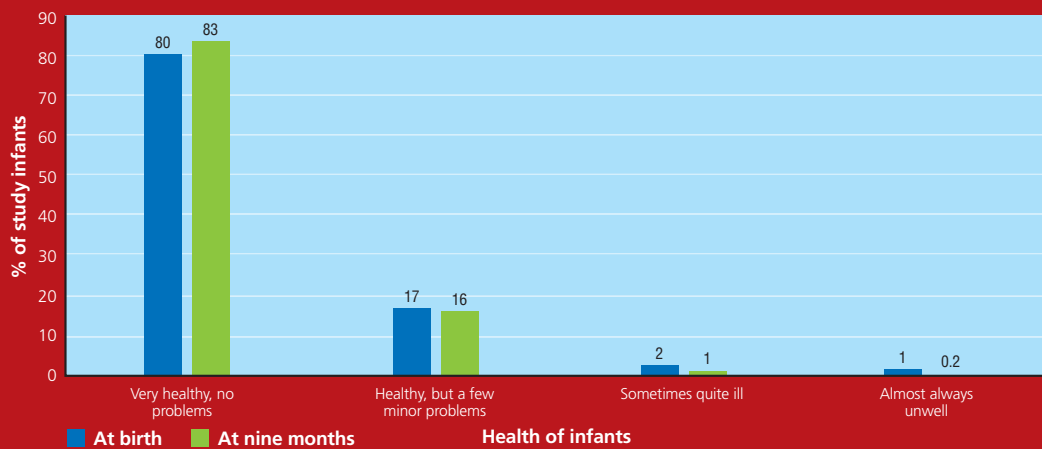
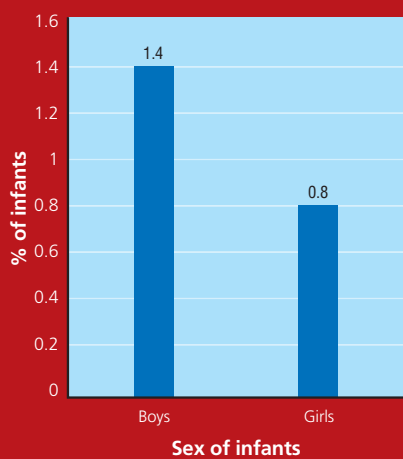


Figure 2: Percentage of male and female infants reported by mothers to be *sometimes* or *often unwell*



SKIN ALLERGIES (E.G. ECZEMA) WERE THE MOST COMMONLY DIAGNOSED ILLNESSES AMONG NINE-MONTH-OLDS

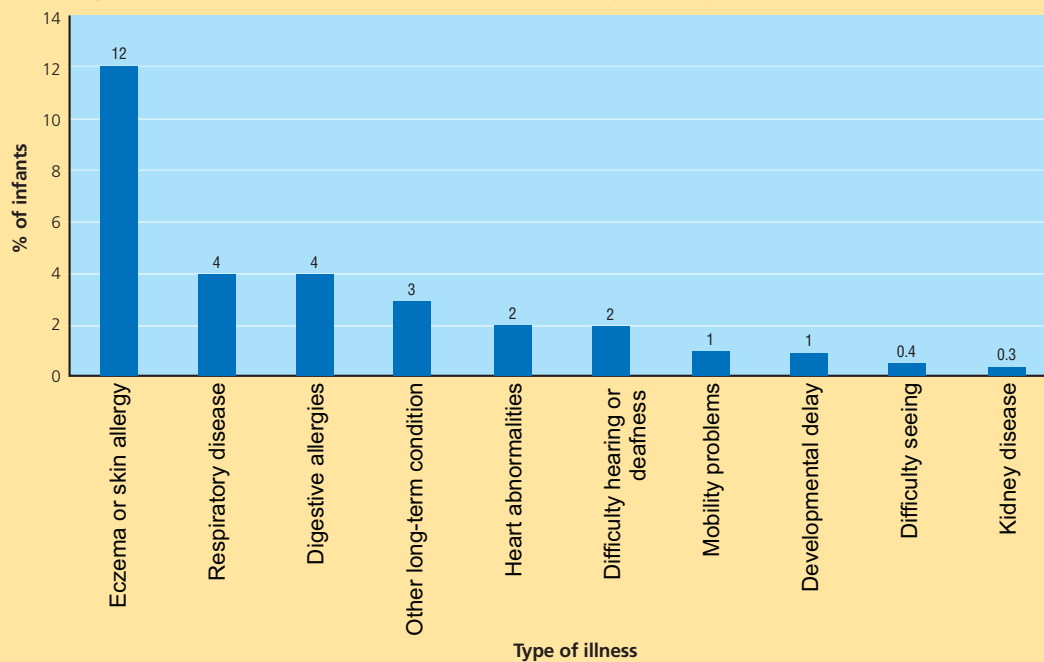
Mothers were presented with a list of pre-coded illnesses and asked to report on whether or not their nine-month-old had been diagnosed by a medical professional as having had any of them.

- 24% of all infants were reported to have been medically diagnosed as having had at least one of the pre-coded illnesses over their first nine months – Figure 3.
- The most common illness reported by mothers was eczema or related skin allergies (12%) (Figure 3). This is in line with levels expected for northern European countries.¹
- Other commonly experienced illnesses included respiratory diseases (4%) and digestive

allergies (4%) (Figure 3).

- The majority of parents who reported that their infant had one of more of the illnesses in question said that it was *minor* (74%) or moderate (19%), while 7% reported it as being a severe illness. When translated to the entire population of 73,700 infants this means that 18% of all infants are described as having a *minor* condition, 4% a *moderate* condition and 2% a *severe* condition.
- Boys (5%) in *Growing Up in Ireland* were significantly more likely than girls (3%) to have a respiratory condition and boys (14%) were also significantly more likely than girls (10%) to be reported to have a skin condition such as eczema – Figure 4.

Figure 3: Most common illnesses for infants as reported by mothers

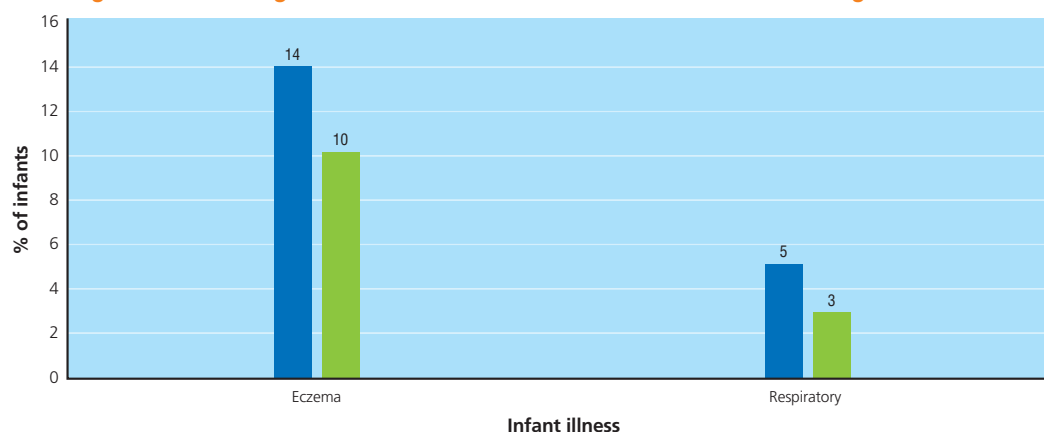


¹ See for example, Hanifin JM, Reed ML (2007) A population-based survey of eczema prevalence in the United States. *Dermatitis* 18:82-91

INFANT SAFETY

- 4% of infants had had an accident that required medical attention.
- Infants whose mothers were not born in Ireland were significantly less likely to have been admitted to hospital for an accident requiring medical attention (3%) than infants of Irish-born mothers (5%).

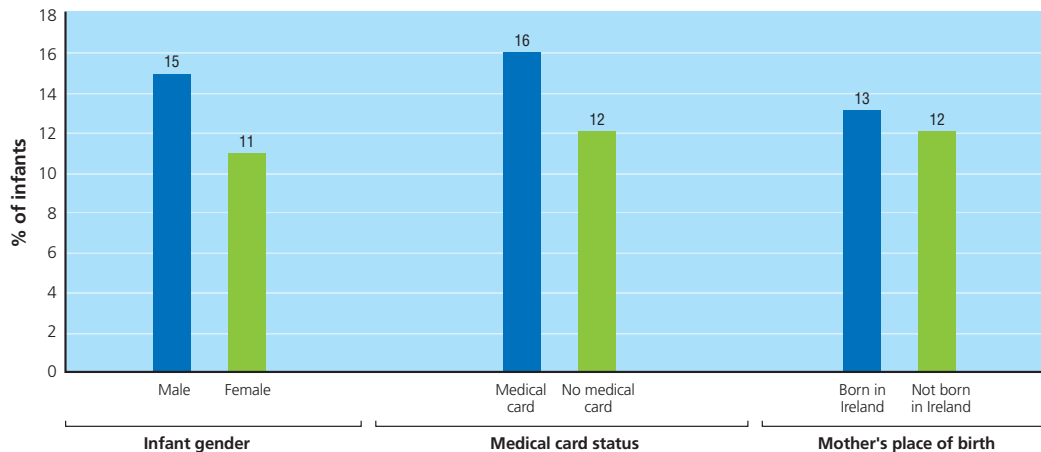
Figure 4: Percentage of male and female infants who had received a diagnosis of eczema or respiratory illness



BOYS MORE LIKELY TO HAVE BEEN ADMITTED TO HOSPITAL THAN GIRLS

- 13% of infants had been admitted to hospital because of an illness or health problem since their birth. This figure is in line with the level reported, for example, among nine-month-olds in Scotland (14%).²
- On average these infants spent six nights in hospital.
- Boys (15%) were significantly more likely to have been admitted to hospital than girls (11%) – Figure 5.
- Hospital admissions were also significantly higher for those infants with a medical card (16%) than those without a medical card (12%), and for infants whose mothers were born in Ireland (13%) than for infants whose mothers were not born in Ireland (12%) – Figure 5.

Figure 5: Hospital admissions classified by infant sex, medical-card cover, and mother's place of birth

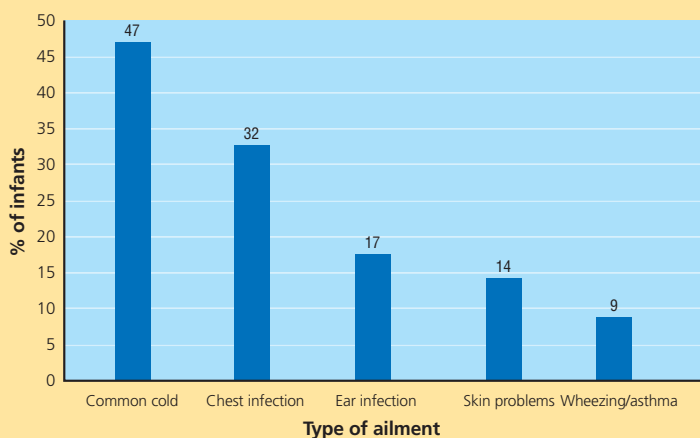


² Growing Up in Scotland Study

15% OF INFANTS NOT COVERED BY MEDICAL CARD OR HEALTH INSURANCE

- 31% of infants in *Growing Up in Ireland* were covered by a medical card and 54% of families had some form of private medical health insurance; 15% of infants' families were not covered by a medical card or medical health insurance.
- On average, mothers had contacted their general practitioner (GP) three times and a public health nurse (PHN) three times regarding their infant's health since birth. The average number of GP contacts was significantly higher for those infants whose families were covered by a medical card (3.37) than for infants with no medical-card cover (2.41).

Figure 6: Most common ailments for which infants required contact with medical professional



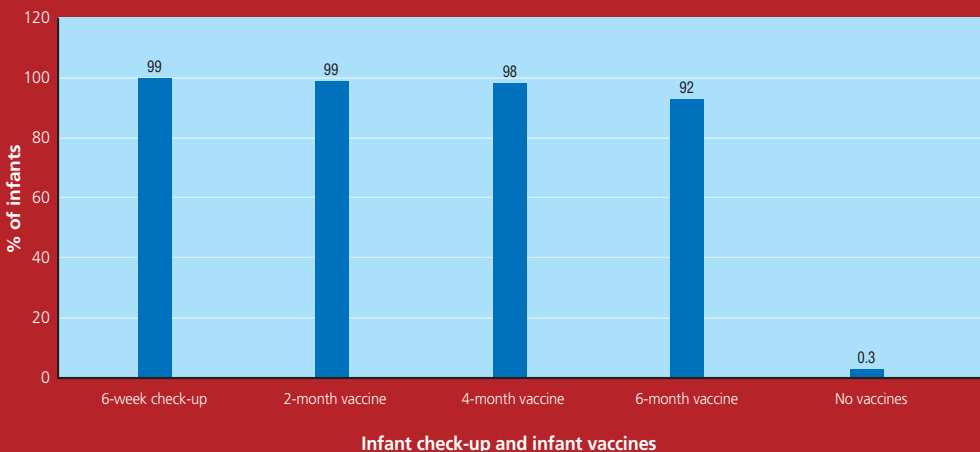
- The most common health problem requiring contact with a medical professional was the common cold (47% of infants), followed by chest infections (32%) and ear infections (17%) – Figure 6.
- 4% of mothers reported that their infant had at some stage since birth required medical attention that they did not receive. From a pre-coded list of possible reasons for this, 1.2% of all mothers recorded that the medical attention had not been available or accessible to them.
- A small percentage of all mothers (0.2%) said they did not receive medical attention for their infant because they couldn't afford to pay.

MOST CHILDREN HAD RECEIVED THEIR EARLY VACCINATIONS

Under the Childhood Immunisation Programme, infants are entitled to certain immunisation services free of charge. These are provided in GP surgeries, in hospitals, or in health clinics. Immunisation is not mandatory, but is strongly advised by the Department of Health and Children.

- Over 99% of infants had received their first six-week check-up – Figure 7.
- 98% of infants have had two vaccinations by the age of four months – Figure 7.
- Less than 1% (0.3%) reported not having had any vaccinations.
- There was a drop in the uptake of vaccinations for infants at six months: only 92% of mothers reported that their infant had had their six-month vaccine – Figure 7.

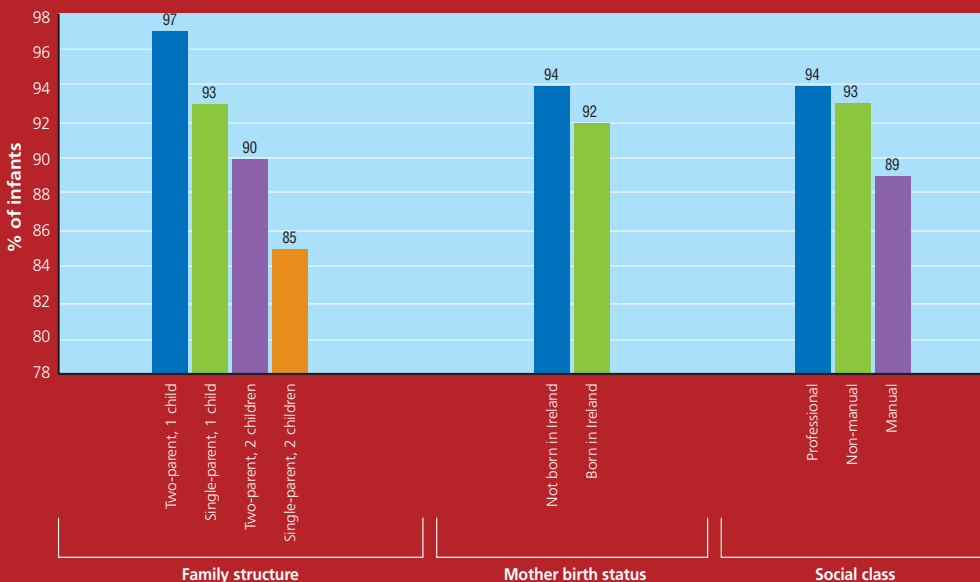
Figure 7: Percentage of infants who had received their six-week check-up and subsequent vaccines



Infant check-up and infant vaccines

- Uptake for the six-month vaccine was significantly higher for infants from the highest-income families (96%).
- Vaccine uptake at six months varied significantly by family structure, social class, and whether or not the infant’s mother had been born in Ireland – Figure 8.

Figure 8: Percentage of infants who had received their six-month vaccine classified by socio-demographic variables



BOYS HEAVIER AT BIRTH THAN GIRLS

Length, weight, and head-circumference measurements were obtained from the infant using medically approved weighing scales and measuring tapes.

- The average weight of infants in *Growing Up in Ireland* was 9.7 kgs, the average length was 72.9 cms and head circumference 46.5 cms.
- On average, boys weighed 10.0 kgs, were 73.8 cms in length and had a head circumference of 47 cms.
- Girls weighed 9.3 kgs on average, measured 71.9 cms in length and had a head circumference of 45.9 cms.
- Infants whose mother was not born in Ireland weighed less (9.62 kgs) than infants born to Irish mothers (9.69 kgs).





Growing Up in Ireland is the National Longitudinal Study of Children in Ireland. This Study aims to track, from infancy through to adolescence, the lives of two representative cohorts of children in Ireland – an Infant Cohort (at nine months) and a Child Cohort (at nine years).

The Study is funded by the Department of Health and Children through the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, in association with the Department of Social Protection and the Central Statistics Office. It is being carried out by a consortium of researchers led by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and Trinity College Dublin (TCD).

The first wave of fieldwork with the families of the Infant Cohort (at nine months) included approximately 11,100 nine-month-olds, their parents and carers. It began in September 2008 and was completed in March 2009. This document is one of a series of *Key Findings* from the Infant Cohort which summarises the main results from that round of the project.

More detailed findings on a wide range of issues are available in '***Growing Up in Ireland*** – the lives of 9-month-olds' (2010). An anonymised version of the data will also be available in the Irish Social Science Data Archive (ISSDA).

The success of ***Growing Up in Ireland*** is the result of contributions from a range of individuals, organisations and groups, many of whom helped to recruit the sample and collect the data. We are particularly grateful to the 11,100 families who gave so generously of their time to make this Study possible.



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