

Longstanding health conditions among three-year-old children in the Republic of Ireland in 2011



The Institute of Public Health (IPH) uses national health survey data to produce population prevalence estimates and forecasts for chronic conditions among adults on the island of Ireland. The method has been systematically developed and documented (see References); this report applies it to young children in the Republic of Ireland.

Longstanding health conditions among children

A longstanding health condition is any illness, condition or disability that has or will trouble a child over a period of time. Children with these conditions can have poorer quality of life, poorer social and emotional development, and poorer educational achievement. Knowing the characteristics of children with these conditions helps us develop policies and plan services for children and their families.

Growing Up in Ireland National Longitudinal Study of Children (GUI)

The report is based on a systematic analysis of data from Wave Two of the Infant Cohort (three-year-old children) of the GUI study. We identified five common serious conditions in the study that were reported by carers:

- A “longstanding illness, condition or disability”
- Diagnosed asthma or asthma symptoms
- Diagnosed eczema/any kind of skin allergy
- Sight problem that required correction
- Hearing problem that required correction.

These conditions are common among three-year-olds

15.8% (about 11,000)

Have “a longstanding illness, condition or disability”

9.5% (about 6,600)

Have diagnosed asthma or asthma symptoms

4.0% (about 2,800)

Have diagnosed eczema/skin allergy

5.9% (about 4,100)

Have ever had a sight problem that required correction



3.9% (about 2,700)

Have ever had a hearing problem that required correction

22.6% of three-year-olds (about 15,800) have at least one of the five conditions included in this report.

Children who are more likely to have the specific conditions

	A “longstanding illness, condition or disability”	Diagnosed asthma or asthma symptoms	Diagnosed eczema/skin allergy	Sight problem that required correction	Hearing problem that required correction
Sex	Boys		Boys		Boys (particularly if they were born with low birthweight)
Primary carer health status	Children whose primary carer is ill	Children whose primary carer is ill (only if the children do not have an allergy)	Children whose primary carer is ill (only if the children do not have a non-skin allergy)		Children whose primary carer is ill
Household social class	Children in lowest social class households			Children in lowest social class households	
Allergies		Children who have an allergy (particularly if their primary carer is well)	Children who have a non-skin allergy (particularly if their primary carer is well)		
Number of parents in household		Children from one parent households			
Private health insurance					Children in households with private health insurance
Birthweight				Children born with low birthweight	Children born with low birthweight (only if they were boys)
Maternal smoking during pregnancy				Children whose mother smoked during pregnancy	

Children who are more likely to have a “longstanding illness, condition or disability”



Boys

50% more likely than girls

Children in lowest social class households

50% more likely than those in other households

Children whose primary carer is ill

Over 100% more likely than those with well primary carers



Children with poor birth circumstances are more likely to have sight problems

Children born with low birthweight

70% more likely than other children

Children whose mother smoked during pregnancy

50% more likely than other children



Risks accumulate

Prevalence of a “longstanding illness, condition or disability”:

11.2%

- Girls
- Primary carer is well
- Highest household social class

39.7%

- Boys
- Primary carer is ill
- Lowest household social class

Prevalence of asthma/asthma symptoms:

6.4%

- Do not have an allergy
- Primary carer is well
- Two parent households

53.9%

- Have an allergy
- Primary carer is ill
- One parent households

Prevalence of sight problems that required correction:

4.3%

- Not born with low birthweight
- Mother did not smoke during pregnancy
- Highest household social class

15.9%

- Born with low birthweight
- Mother smoked during pregnancy
- Lowest household social class

If we account for differences in household social class, children with poor birth circumstances are 2.5 times more likely than children without these circumstances to have a sight problem that required correction.

Conclusions



Longstanding conditions are common among three-year-olds.

Inequalities in health that are so evident in adult years are also evident at this early age.

The conditions are more common among boys, children from poorer socio-economic circumstances, children whose carer is ill and children with poorer birth circumstances.

The risks of having the conditions accumulate and prevalence is very large among children with several risk factors.

Addressing data limitations would greatly improve the value of prevalence estimates to local planning and service delivery.

References

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More details

The executive summary, full report, and detailed data tables are available at the Chronic Conditions Hub website <http://chronicconditions.thehealthwell.info/>