



Public Health  
England

Protecting and improving the nation's health

# Health Profiles Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

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# About the Health Profiles

## Why do the Health Profiles include these particular indicators?

The selection of Health Profiles content requires balancing several factors:

- the need to highlight important public health topics
- the need to focus on problems that can be addressed by local services
- the availability of data across the entire country (because we need to produce a profile for each and every local authority in England)
- the need to keep the profiles clear for users who are not familiar with medical or statistical language
- the limited space available in the Health Profiles

The Health Profiles need to reflect health for a diverse population throughout all stages of life, and so there is a limit to the number of indicators that can be provided for any one issue. Where possible, an indicator is selected that will draw attention to potential problems, so that these can be discussed.

For example, the Health Profiles include an indicator showing the rate of new sexually transmitted infection diagnoses. This can only tell users whether the rate is similar to the rest of England – it cannot show why it might be different, or whether particular groups of people are affected, or whether the people diagnosed are well cared for. All this information will come from further discussions between local organisations and may require the use of additional information sources. There are more specific profiling tools that provide further indicators focused on specific issues, and these can be used to help understand an area or problem in more detail – for example [Healthier lives](#) or other tools available from the PHE data and analysis tools, [www.gov.uk/guidance/phe-data-and-analysis-tools](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/phe-data-and-analysis-tools).

## Who are Health Profiles designed for?

The local authority Health Profiles are intended to be used by local government, community groups and health services. The profiles are also publicly available. They are intended to present statistical information in a format that is clear to lay users.

## What are Health Profiles for?

The Health Profiles are used to help prioritise and plan services. They are designed to help show the differences in health (or factors that affect health) between different places within England, so that the right services can be put in place for each area.

## What about the positive aspects in my area, not just the problems?

Health Profiles show where health in your area is better than the average for England, as well as worse. A green circle for an indicator shows that for that particular issue, the area is doing better than the national average.

However, this isn't the same as saying that there isn't a problem. For example, an area can show a green circle for smoking related deaths because they have fewer deaths than average – but hundreds of people a year could still be dying from smoking in this area and reducing smoking could still be a local priority.

## Why are the Health Profiles focused on Local Authorities?

Local authorities took on responsibility for public health in 2013. They have always played an important part in delivering or commissioning services to improve health, provide care or reduce inequalities. All local authorities in England have a community plan which outlines the action that they intend to take to improve conditions in their local area. Health Profiles aim to help local authorities produce their local community plans. Health Profiles can be used to enable Health and Wellbeing Boards to identify their priorities for action.

Local Authority (LA) is a generic term for any level of local government in the United Kingdom. In geographic terms LAs include English counties, county districts, metropolitan districts, unitary authorities and London boroughs. Historically, many health-related datasets are available at local authority level.

## Why are there only three types of local authorities used in the sub-heading of the Health Profiles from 2014 onwards?

Area profiles include a subheading under the area name, identifying the local authority as 'County', 'Unitary Authority' or 'District'. This is included to show whether the area is classed as having upper tier responsibilities (counties), lower tier (districts) or both (unitary authorities). It does not fully reflect the different types or names of local authorities (e.g. metropolitan county districts, London Boroughs etc.), which may have unitary authority responsibilities but are not formally designated as such.

## Where can I find out about differences in health within my neighbourhood, not just my local authority?

Local Health is a tool developed in response to feedback from Health Profiles users, who requested information for smaller areas within local authorities and particularly for electoral wards. It gives you access to interactive maps, data and reports at electoral ward and middle super output area (MSOA) level as well as for whole local authorities

(MSOA have a minimum of 5,000 residential population (an average of 7,700) and 2,000 households (an average of 3,200). Please note though that E02006781 (Isles of Scilly 001) is much smaller than this, but has been included as a pseudo-MSOA to give complete national coverage).

Local Health includes many of the indicators presented in Health Profiles and more. Local Health also allows you to build your own unique area by selecting a combination of smaller ones, and to produce maps and reports for these bespoke areas. Reports produced in Local Health allow you to compare any selected area to the England average for a number of indicators.

Full instructions and indicator details are available from the Local Health website, [www.localhealth.org.uk](http://www.localhealth.org.uk).

### Can I see data for my region?

You can use the Health Profiles online tool to view the data by region (by selecting region from the Area type box). Regional values are also displayed when region is selected in the Areas grouped by box.

The pdf Regional Health Profiles have not been produced since 2011 and are not planned for future production.

### Why are some ranges not displayed in the spine chart?

Range information is not shown whenever more than 25% of areas have no data, this could be due to a number of reasons including: a local number too small to calculate a reliable rate; due to suppression; or due to data quality. Causes for suppression of values can be found using the online tool.

### What about health in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland?

Information can be found for these areas on their public health observatory websites:

Scotland: The Scottish Public Health Observatory, <http://www.scotpho.org.uk/comparative-health/profiles/online-profiles-tool>

Wales: Public Health Wales Observatory, <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/922/home>

Ireland: Ireland and Northern Ireland's Population Health Observatory, <http://www.inispho.org/>

# About the Health Profiles online tool

## What is the online tool?

The online tool is a bespoke software tool called Fingertips and is managed and developed within Public Health England.

Fingertips is a suite of interactive web tools designed to provide easy access to in-depth analysis of a wide range of health and health related data in thematic profiles, one of which is the Health Profiles.

Many (but not all) of the PHE data and analysis tools present data using fingertips, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/phe-data-and-analysis-tools>

## What does the online tool show?

It shows the Health Profiles data in a more interactive format, enabling production of maps, 'tartan rug' comparison charts for different areas and regions. The online tool allows the user to download the latest data whilst also linking to the pdf reports.

The Health Profiles online tool presents the same indicators as the spine chart on page 4 of the pdf Health Profiles, but the online data is updated more often as it becomes available (the tool is updated quarterly, the pdfs are produced once a year), so it is possible that the pdf Health Profiles and online Health Profiles tool may show different indicator values. Where this is the case, the online Health Profiles tool should be based on more recent data.

## Which indicators are updated in the online tool more often than in the pdf reports?

The online tool is updated on a quarterly basis. During each quarterly update period the availability of new data is checked for each indicator, if new data are available then the indicator will be updated. This means the same data are presented across PHE's products where the same indicators are presented within them (e.g. the Public Health Outcomes Framework).

The indicators most recently updated can be seen in the recent updates section of the [Health Profiles online tool](#).

For details on previous updates visit the Health Profiles collection on GOV.UK:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/health-profiles>

The data is not changed in the pdf reports, which are maintained as an annual snapshot.

### Have any corrections been made to the data in the online tool?

Any corrections will be stated in the recent updates section of the online tool. Corrections are made online but will not be retrospectively applied to the pdf reports so the online tool is the best place to see or download the most up to date and accurate data.

### Which indicators have been updated since the last pdf reports?

The time period for each indicator is clearly stated in the period column of the overview tab or in the definitions tab, this can be compared with the time period for the data as stated in the pdf report.

### When is the next planned update and which indicators will change?

The next annual update of the pdf profiles is announced on the website:

<http://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/health-profiles> and at  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/announcements>

Details of changes to indicators are included as part of the announcement, a detailed list of all previous announcements can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/health-profiles>

### Can I find out more information about each indicator?

Information on the methodology used to calculate each indicator, including the underlying source data and links to further information can be accessed via the Definitions tab (select the indicator of interest from the dropdown box).

### Can I access the underlying data used in the online tool?

Data can be downloaded directly from the online Health Profiles tool via the Download tab.

### What does the inequalities domain show?

This domain is a new addition in May 2016. Its purpose is to include the information included on pages 2 & 3 of the pdf profiles in the online tool.

The overview shows the total value for each area (where available) for each indicator. The intention is for these values to be further dissected into different groups i.e. by ethnicity, gender or deprivation. This is achieved using the inequalities view and by selecting the partition of interest using the 'Partition data by' box.

### Can I download the data for the charts displayed on the inequalities view?

The the online Health Profiles tool does not have the functionality to allow the download of these data as yet. The Health Profiles team plan to make these data available via a downloadable excel spreadsheet. Users of the tool can can export the chart directly using the 'Export chart as image' button.

### Why do these indicators not appear in the all spine chart indicators domain?

These indicators are intended to provide additional information on certain topics which do appear in the spine chart. They are included in a separate domain to try to highlight the fact that further inequalities partitions are available for them. Including them in the all spine chart indicators domain would result in duplication.



## About the data

### How did you choose the indicators?

We included an indicator if it met the following criteria:

- It is important for the health of the local population
- It can support local government and NHS management processes
- It is valid in that it measures what it tries to measure
- It is primarily based on existing indicators consistently available across England
- It is available at Local Authority level
- It allows meaningful comparisons to be made between places
- It can be communicated easily to a wide audience.

### What is the Slope Index of Inequality?

In the key messages for most Health Profiles, the life expectancy gap between the most and least deprived in the local authority is described using the Slope Index of Inequality. This is also displayed in the form of a graph at the bottom of page 2 of the profile. The Slope Index provides a measure of inequality based on the relationship between life expectancy and deprivation across the whole of the local authority. For more details on the Slope Index [click here](#).

### What are Official Statistics?

Health Profiles 2011 onwards are produced in accordance with Official Statistics guidance. This ensures that the messages in the profiles are based on sound evidence and free of any political influence. Only the production teams and a very small number of key staff see the final profiles before they are published.

### Why have some of the indicators changed from previous years?

Indicators have changed where new data has become available, where the changes to the indicator would represent an improvement or make the indicator more relevant. The selection and methodology of indicators is maintained where possible.

From 2014 onwards the Health Profiles have been drawing closer to other PHE products and therefore a number of methodologies have been aligned with the Public Health Outcomes Framework (PHOF), Local Tobacco Control Profiles and National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) profiles.

### Where do the data come from?

The data in Health Profiles come from several different sources. The sources are given in the metadata which also provides details of how each indicator is created. See the Definitions tab of the Health Profiles online tool for more details.

### Why are the data years in the profiles not the same as the year the profiles are released?

We use the most up to date data available at the time we create the profiles. Not all of the sources we use are updated every year.

## About the Health Profiles project

The Health Profiles programme is part of the Chief Knowledge Officer's Directorate of Public Health England. Local government and health services are the intended users of the profiles. These users are represented at Board level within the programme to ensure that the products are suited to their needs.

The Populations Product Board are responsible for agreeing the content of the profiles (which indicators to include, and confirming that they are of acceptable quality), the presentation of data within them (what format of charts to present, how to lay out content, what text to include) and which people should receive them.

Creation and quality assurance of indicator data is undertaken by analysts within the Knowledge and Intelligence Service, in the Chief Knowledge Officers directorate at PHE. The process is overseen by the Indicators Team who have responsibility for the the production and quality assurance of indicators across a number of products, such as the Public Health Outcomes Framework (PHOF).

**Could you help demonstrate the Health Profiles or Local Health to my colleagues, or at our event?**

If you would like us to present information about the Health Profiles or Local Health, please contact us at [healthprofiles@phe.gov.uk](mailto:healthprofiles@phe.gov.uk)

**How do you produce the pdf Health Profiles?**

The pdf profiles are created using a module of the Fingertips software tool, which takes in the indicator data and processes it into the four page pdf format.

Local priorities are requested from each local area via the PHE Local Knowledge and Intelligence Service (LKIS).

Prior to publication each pdf document goes through a quality assurance process undertaken by analysts working within LKIS.

**How do you produce the interactive content in Health Profiles?**

The interactive content (maps, comparison charts, spine charts, data download) are created using Fingertips, a bespoke software tool within Public Health England.

## How to find out more

Briefings that accompany each release of the Health Profiles are published online on the GOV.UK website. These are presented in a collection for Health Profiles so that current and previous releases can easily be found in one place:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/health-profiles>

### Can you help me understand what my profile results mean?

If you would like to know more about the health of your local community, you should contact your local council. If you would like further help using your Health Profile, please contact the Health Profiles team through the Contact us section of the website.

If you would like help understanding the data contained in your Health Profile, please see the definitions section of the online tool. If you would like to download the data that has been used in the Health Profile, this can be accessed through the Download section of the Health Profiles online tool. Further information on the health of local communities is available from [www.data.gov.uk](http://www.data.gov.uk).

### How do I find out more about health in my local area?

Each area profile report includes a link to further information within the summary text on the front page. You could also look for health related information produced by your local authority and GP practice. The NHS Choices website, [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk), is good starting point to look up information relating to your area. The website [www.data.gov.uk](http://www.data.gov.uk) will help you identify what sources of data are available relating to the topic or area you are interested in.

For information broken down by smaller geographies (e.g. electoral wards) the [Local Health](#) tool has been developed, allowing you to build your own unique area by selecting a combination of smaller ones, and to produce maps and reports for these bespoke areas.

### What can I do to help support action on the health problems in my local area?

The Health Profiles have been produced to help local people make decisions about improving health where they live or work. You can find out how you can get involved by contacting your local council.

### Where can I find out more about Public Health?

If you want to know more about the health of your local community, you can read the report of your Director of Public Health, which should be available from your local council.

If you want to know more about the work of public health specialists and practitioners, information is available from the Faculty of Public Health ([www.fph.org.uk](http://www.fph.org.uk)) and the Royal Society of Public Health ([www.rsph.org.uk](http://www.rsph.org.uk)).

If you want to know more about people working in public health in your local area, you should contact your local council.

### Where can I find out more about health and Local Government?

The Local Government Association website (<http://www.local.gov.uk/home>) provides information on all the work undertaken, including health.