

FACT SHEET: MATERNITY SERVICES IN WIGTOWNSHIRE



Wigtownshire and the people who live there

The total number of people living in Dumfries and Galloway is unlikely to change much over the next 25 years. However, people are living longer and more people are living with more health conditions. This will impact on the local economy as there will be fewer people available to work or provide unpaid care for family and friends. This will affect health and social care services, including maternity services.

Dumfries and Galloway is a rural region with 45% of the population living in settlements of fewer than 3,000 people. In Wigtownshire the figure is 49%. Remote rural living has its benefits, but it also leads to challenges – such as long travel times, limited public transport, and problems accessing online communication. 40% of people in Wigtownshire and 25% of people in the whole of Dumfries and Galloway have to travel for more than 30 minutes to reach the nearest large town.

The number of births in Wigtownshire each year is falling. Births in Wigtownshire have been decreasing since 2008. In Wigtownshire, there were 215 births in 2020, 189 births in 2021 and 200 births in 2022. There are around 4,100 women of childbearing age (15–44) in Wigtownshire. This number is not expected to change significantly before 2041. However, the proportion of these women who are having babies each year has decreased in Wigtownshire, from 9 in every 1,000 women in 2008, to 7 in every 1,000 women in 2021. This is a faster decline than elsewhere in the region.

Risks of pregnancy and childbirth

More pregnant women each year have factors that increase the risk of pregnancy. 77% of pregnancies in Wigtownshire in 2021 were classified as high risk – 23% were classified as low risk.

A pregnancy can become more risky because of:

- obesity, high blood pressure, or diabetes
- other health conditions that exist before pregnancy or are new during a pregnancy
- general health before and during pregnancy
- family history of some health conditions
- becoming pregnant at an older age
- lifestyle and social factors before and during pregnancy
- experience of difficulties during a previous pregnancy
- multiple pregnancies (twins, triplets)

The **Oak Tree Family Centre** provides care before and after birth, including both high risk consultant led care and low risk community led care. It does not provide a birthing service.

The **Clenoch Birthing Centre** in Galloway Community Hospital in Stranraer used to provide a low risk birthing service. If there were complications during birth, women would be transferred to the consultant led unit in DGRI. However, a shortage of staff forced NHS Dumfries and Galloway to stop providing the birthing service in 2018.

The number of women giving birth in the Clenoch Birthing Centre in Galloway Community Hospital fell every year for five years before inpatient maternity services were transferred to Dumfries and Galloway Royal Infirmary (DGRI). In 2018, the last year in which the Clenoch Birthing Centre was open, 17 women gave birth there.

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Support for pregnant women in Wigtownshire and across the region

Consultant led care provides care for high risk pregnancies that require a higher level of care, or require help during birth. The only place providing consultant led care during birth in the region is DGRI.

Community led care is provided by midwives before, during and after birth for pregnancies that are considered low risk. There are no specialist consultants present. This care is provided before and after birth at home, in a GP practice, or somewhere else.

Care before birth

Care for pregnant women before birth normally starts when they see their GP. They will be assigned to a community midwife who will be responsible for most of their care before birth.

Typically, pregnant women see a community midwife 10 times during their first pregnancy and 7 times during any later pregnancies. They will be offered screening appointments, sonograms and classes. Classes can be in person at the Oak Tree Family Centre or at Newton Stewart Health Centre, or at home on a video link. Screening and sonograms take place at the Oak Tree Family Centre.

Midwives in Wigtownshire have an average caseload of 30 women. By comparison, midwives in the east of Dumfries and Galloway have an average caseload of 41 women.

Care during birth

Where a pregnancy is considered high risk the advice is to give birth with consultant-led care in DGRI. Where a pregnancy is considered low risk the woman has the choice to give birth at home with community-led care, or in DGRI. Some may have complications during birth that mean they have to travel to DGRI for a higher level of care.

Births can also happen before a woman arrives in hospital (for example, at home unplanned or while travelling to the hospital). Across Dumfries and Galloway, there are typically 10 babies born before arriving in hospital each year (less than 1% of all births). These occur across the region.

In each year there would be a total of around 1100 births. Of those 1100 births, around 480 are induced births, in which medication is used to start the process of birth. 135 births require help with instruments to allow the baby to be born safely. 305 births are by caesarean section (emergency and planned). The remainder, around 180, are spontaneous vaginal low risk births.

Care after birth

Babies that are born early or who are very unwell might need extra care in a neonatal unit – either at DGRI or, for higher levels of care, elsewhere in Scotland. In 2020/21, around 1 in 10 babies born to parents from Dumfries and Galloway needed some care in a neonatal unit.

Care after birth is provided at first by community midwives and later by a health visitor. They will arrange screening appointments and immunisation, and will put the mother in touch with local support groups.

To find out more

For more detailed information, please read the full information pack, which is available for download at [\[LINK\]](#) or contact the Partnership Communications Team at dgcommunications@nhs.scot or 01387 246246.