



Department
for Education



Reference number: {x}

Dear {x}

Happy New Year!

Children of the 2020s news update: January 2024

We are excited to let you know that **the first Children of the 2020s results have been published**, and we're glad to be able to share some key findings with you below.

We also wanted to remind you that **there is still time to complete the Age 2 Survey** if you haven't already done so. You will have already received a separate email from children2020s@ipsosresearch.com with your survey invitation. Completing the Age 2 survey will help us understand children's development and improve early education, childcare and family services. We would be so grateful for your help in doing this.

Age 9 months report

Here are some highlights from the published report:

- At age 9 months, 97% of parents reported that their children were in good health, although 41% had had a COVID-19 infection during infancy
- Cost of living pressures were evident, as a quarter of families reported that they experienced financial strain in 2022
- Despite this, parents found time to do plenty of stimulating activities at home with their babies. Turn-taking games like peekaboo, and reading books, were particularly strongly linked with babies' language development

Read on to find out more!

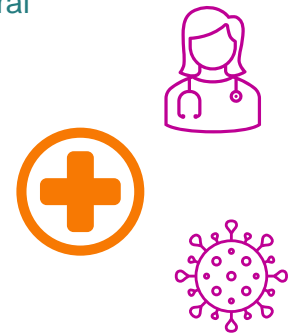
Children's health

We asked about the health and development of the Children of the 2020s children, to provide important information about the current health needs of babies in England and allow us to follow their developmental, wellbeing and educational outcomes.

The majority of children were in good (19%) or very good (78%) general health at age 9 months.

However, a quarter of children (26%) had a serious or longstanding health or developmental condition. The most common were:

- allergies and intolerances
- skin problems
- breathing conditions
- stomach and digestion problems.



41% of children had a confirmed or suspected COVID-19 infection by age 9 months and 14% of mothers had a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection during their pregnancy.



Language development

Children understood on average 14 out of a list of 51 common words at age 9 months, which was not significantly different from pre-pandemic averages.

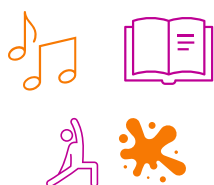


This is very valuable information because many professionals have been concerned that babies' early learning might be affected by the pandemic, even in the later stages of it that the Children of the 2020s babies experienced. Although it's early days, these initial signs are encouraging, and we will keep measuring language and early learning as the children get older.

Fun and games: how do children in the 2020s spend their time?

Children of the 2020s parents are very engaged with their babies! Some of the most popular things that parents and carers did every day with their babies at age 9 months were cuddling, playing with toys, and talking to them. Most parents also did physical play, turn-taking play and sang to their child. These activities help to support children's development, well-being, and early learning.

The more regularly parents talked and played with their 9-month-olds, the more words the children understood. Turn-taking games like peekaboo, and reading books, were particularly strongly linked with babies' understanding of language.



About 37% of parents/carers took their children to baby classes, playgroups or play sessions by age 9 months, such as baby massage and yoga classes, swimming classes, signing groups, baby singing groups, and messy play groups.

- A third had to pay for the class they attended.

It was very interesting to see how popular these sorts of play activities and classes were, but, in a time of very tight household budgets, it also highlighted the fact that for some parents the costs involved might be a barrier.

Children typically watched on average 29 minutes per day of television, videos, or other digital content on a screen at age 9 months. 28% did not typically watch anything on a screen, while 7% did so for more than 2 hours a day.

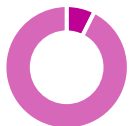


- The amount of time spent watching digital content on a screen was not linked to the number of words the children understood.

The Children of the 2020s babies may turn out to be the most digitally-sophisticated children yet, and it was interesting to see that many were already interacting with screens before their first birthday.

Raising a family in the 2020s

The results also indicate that dads are more involved in raising babies compared to 20 years ago. In the Age 2 survey we are asking more questions to find out how parents share the day-to-day care of their children.



At age 9 months, just over 1 in 14 children were primarily cared for by their father, an increase from 20 years ago when only one in 1,000 nine-month-olds were cared for primarily by their dad.



32% of today's primary caregivers were on parental leave from their job when their child was nine months old, compared to just 2.5% of primary caregivers 20 years ago.

A quarter of families (25%) were experiencing at least one of the following types of financial strain¹ at the time of the survey (June to Nov 2022):

- not keeping up with bills and debts
- finding it very difficult to manage financially
- skipping or reducing meal size due to lack of money
- unable to afford essential baby items.



These findings show that quite a lot of families with babies experienced significant financial pressures since the pandemic. But despite these challenges, families are managing to do a lot to support their children and are really engaged with providing children with a fun and stimulating home environment.

This is just a small snapshot of the findings from the first wave of the Children of the 2020s Study. These important findings will help guide policymakers about important

priorities for families. None of this would be possible without your support, so a huge thank you to you all!

Full report and media coverage

You can find the full age 9-month survey report here ([link](#)). The report has received media coverage by [The Times](#), the [Independent](#), and the [Evening Standard](#), to name a few. The director of the study, Professor Pasco Fearon, was interviewed on [BBC Radio 4's Today](#) programme on 1 December, where he stated that parents and carers involved in the study are “arguably one of the most engaged and child-centred generations of parents we have ever seen” and “doing a brilliant job stimulating and supporting their babies”. You can catch the full interview at 50 minutes and 20 seconds into the program.

What's next?

As part of the Children of the 2020s, we will invite you to participate about once a year until your child is 5 years old. The next things to look out for are:

- If you have not done your Age 2 survey yet, please look out for your reminder email from children2020s@ipsosresearch.com!
- Around two months after your child turns 3 years old, we will invite you to take part in the Age 3 survey. This will be a face-to-face interview about your family life and your child's development when they have turned 3 years old. We look forward to finding out how you are getting on!
- The Department for Education will publish a detailed report on the findings from the Age 2 Children of the 2020s survey. This will be free to read online. We will email you when it's available.
- **TEXTFILL IF NOT MULTIBIRTH:** {"We will continue to release monthly BabySteps app research activities which you can complete to earn rewards that can be exchanged for e-vouchers. Read below for details on how to register on the app."}

If you would like to get more involved in the Children of the 2020s, you can join our participant advisory group where you can provide ideas and suggestions about how we are conducting the study. If you are interested let us know by emailing babysteps@ucl.ac.uk.

BabySteps app!

Thank you so much to the 6400 of you who have registered on the app so far!

It is not too late get involved with BabySteps! You can download and register by following the instructions on the [study website](#). If you have forgotten your login code, please email babysteps@ucl.ac.uk.

We recently asked BabySteps users how we can improve the app, some of the things suggested that we have done include:

- Fixing app bugs and adding updates to make the app run a lot smoother (remember to update your app; see details below).
- Working on a new set of trackers that will help you record all the special moment and milestones that your little one goes through.
- Adding more News and Articles for you to get stuck into including a video blog interview with a childcare expert! This will be coming in the app in the next few weeks – so please stay tuned!



Remember to keep your app up to date. If your phone does not automatically update your apps, you can manually update it by searching 'BabySteps Children of the 20s' in the App Store/Google Play and pressing the update button. If you have any questions or require any assistance with the app, please contact the UCL study team by emailing babysteps@ucl.ac.uk or calling the freephone number 0203 108 2248.

Need some help?

If you have any questions about Children of the 2020s please check the Frequently Asked Questions page of the website: <https://children2020s.ipsos.com/faqs/>, email us at children2020s@ipsos.com or leave a message on our Freephone 0800 056 8184.

If your contact details have changed since we last spoke to you, please email us at children2020s@ipsos.com and provide us with the following information: Your name, your reference number (this can be found at the top of this email), your new contact details and the date these details changed.

Thank you very much for being a part of Children of the 2020s and helping us learn more about how to support young children and their families. We hope you have enjoyed this news update.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Pasco Fearon
Study Director, UCL

Frances Forsyth
Project Manager, Department for Education

¹If you are struggling financially, or need some advice on other aspects of early family life and wellbeing please visit our study website (<https://children2020s.ipsos.com/advice/>) where you can find a number of helpful resources.

