

23 August 2007

**Coverage**  
England and Wales

## New health expectancy data for small areas

There were wide geographic variations between wards in England and Wales in the length of time people can expect to live without disability (or disability-free), according to experimental figures published today for the first time by the Office for National Statistics.

In 1999-2003, all Government Office Regions in England, and Wales, contained some wards with very high and very low disability-free life expectancy values. However, there were clear regional differences in the pattern of distribution of wards across disability-free life expectancy quintiles (see attached table).

Forty-two per cent of wards in the South East, 29 per cent in the East of England and 26 per cent in the South West were in the quintile (fifth of wards) with the highest disability-free life expectancy at birth. In contrast, only 4 per cent of wards in the North East, 3 per cent in Wales and 10 per cent in the North West were in this top quintile.

The regional pattern was reversed for the quintile of wards with the lowest disability-free life expectancy values. While 55 per cent of wards in the North East, 45 per cent in Wales and 37 per cent in the North West were in the bottom quintile, less than 5 per cent of wards in the South East, the East of England and the South West were in the bottom quintile.

Disability-free life expectancy for wards varied more widely within regions than between regions. The largest variation between wards occurred in the North West, the North East and Wales, and the smallest in the East of England, the South West and the South East.

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The disability-free life expectancy estimates for individual wards have fairly wide margins of error (confidence intervals) and users should be cautious when trying to identify individual wards with the 'highest' or the 'lowest' values. For example, figures for the top ten wards were not significantly different from each other, and likewise neither were the figures for the bottom ten wards.

Figures on healthy life expectancy for wards in England and Wales are also being released at the same time. The pattern of geographic distribution for healthy life expectancy at birth was similar to that for disability-free life expectancy.

These data are experimental statistics as they are currently undergoing testing and evaluation and have not yet been shown to meet the National Statistics quality criteria. It is important for users to be aware of the status of the statistics and the associated potential limitations.

The results can be seen online at:

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=14936>

### **Consultation**

ONS is launching a public consultation exercise on these data today and users are encouraged to respond. The closing date is 23 November 2007. More details of this and how to respond can be seen on the National Statistics website:

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/consultations/life-expec-birth-est.asp>

## BACKGROUND NOTES

1. The detailed methodology and the data sources used, how to interpret the results and what the limitations are, is described in an accompanying report available on the National Statistics website: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=14936>
2. The availability of 2001 Census data at small area level has made the production of disability-free life expectancy (DFLE) and healthy life expectancy (HLE) for wards possible. These two health expectancy estimates were calculated by combining experimental life expectancy data for wards (based on five years' deaths data for the period 1999-2003 and population estimates for 2001) with the 2001 Census responses to 'limiting long-term illness' and 'general health' questions, respectively, at ward level.
3. Release of these new data for wards is a continuation of work reported in an article in *Health Statistics Quarterly* 34 investigating the relationship between health expectancies and deprivation, available at: [www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/article.asp?ID=1807&Pos=1&ColRank=1&Rank=1](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/article.asp?ID=1807&Pos=1&ColRank=1&Rank=1)
4. HLE and DFLE results were calculated for all people in each of the wards in England and Wales. Separate figures for males and females were also calculated where the sex-specific populations of wards were large enough to produce reliable results. Wards with populations of less than 1,000 males or females were excluded from the analysis when calculating HLE and DFLE by sex.
5. For comparison purposes, DFLE and HLE at birth for local authorities (LAs) and Government Office Regions (GORs) have also been calculated. To be consistent with the method used for wards, these estimates were calculated by combining, (a) life expectancy for local authorities and GORs based on 5 years deaths (1999-2003) and populations estimates for 2001, and (b) the 2001 Census health rates for 'without limiting long-term illness' and 'good/fairly good health'. They, therefore, differ slightly from the previously released LA/GOR figures calculated using 3-years' (2000-2002) mortality and population estimates data. These are available on the National Statistics website [http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme\\_health/Health\\_Expectancies.xls](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_health/Health_Expectancies.xls)
6. The level of variation in DFLE values between wards located within each Government Office Region and Wales was measured using the standard deviation which is a statistical measure of dispersion of individual ward values around their mean.
7. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available from the press office.