

# Health issues

## Regional variations in the UK

### A local investigation

A starting point is to visit the website that provides information on Health Profiles on a Primary Care Trust (PCT) basis ([www.apho.org.uk](http://www.apho.org.uk)). You can investigate by area name or full postcode. Go to *Health profiles* and then to *Find profiles*. The aims of the Health Profiles are:

- ▶ To provide a consistent, concise, comparable and balanced overview of the population's health that informs local needs assessment, policy, planning and practice.
- ▶ To summarise the most essential and useful health indicators
- ▶ To assist joint efforts by local government and the health service to improve health and reduce health inequalities
- ▶ To describe the health of the local population and enable comparison locally, regionally and nationally as well as over time. It is hoped that they will be used for action planning

In addition, regional profiles were also created for the first time in 2008 to provide a ranked comparison of local authorities and counties within each region.

#### Case study

### Doncaster PCT

Doncaster is a Spearhead area. You can obtain a pdf of its Health Profile at [www.apho.org.uk/resource/view.aspx?RID=50215&SEARCH=Doncaster](http://www.apho.org.uk/resource/view.aspx?RID=50215&SEARCH=Doncaster). According to this report, in 2008:

- The health of people in Doncaster was worse than that of England as a whole.
- Obesity in adults, people diagnosed with diabetes, and early deaths from heart disease, stroke and cancer all appeared worse than the England averages.
- There were health inequalities within Doncaster by gender and deprivation. For example, men from the most deprived areas had nearly 7 years' shorter life expectancy than those in the least deprived areas.
- Over the previous 10 years, mortality rates from all causes and early deaths from cancer had decreased but remained consistently above the national average.
- Early death rates from heart disease and stroke had fallen faster in Doncaster than for England as a whole



- Compared with the average for England, the rate of deaths from smoking remained higher than average. Around 600 people die from smoking each year in Doncaster.
- A lower than average rate of children were classified as obese. However, rates of teenage pregnancy, start of breast-feeding, and smoking in pregnancy were all worse than the averages for England.

A group of students investigated how factors such as age, gender and wealth affected access to facilities for exercise, healthcare and nutrition in Doncaster. This is what they found:

- Many aspects of health provision are linked to age. Doncaster has one of the highest conception rates in the country among women under 18. However, there was a decrease of 24.1% in this figure between 1998 and 2006. To help reduce the number of teenage pregnancies ‘More than a number’ was launched in 2005 by the NHS and Doncaster Council’s youth service to provide advice and information on sexual health and drugs abuse. The Jigsaw House in Doncaster provides advice, information and counselling for 15–25 year olds to help address the social and welfare issues which affect the health and well-being of young people.
  - Under 16s find it difficult to gain access to private health and fitness clubs. Active Doncaster has been established to get more people participating and organising sports and physical activities to meet local needs. In 2009 people over the age of 60 were given free access to all the local authority’s swimming pools in an attempt to deal with lack of exercise among the older population.
  - Many aspects of health in Doncaster are linked to wealth. It has been ranked as 40th most deprived of the 254 local authorities in England. The unemployment rate of 5.8%, is higher than the England average of 5.5%. Doncaster was once a coal-
- mining area — all but one of its coal pits have now closed, creating pockets of high unemployment such as Mexborough and Moorends.
  - Doncaster still has a high number of people suffering from obesity (27.8%) compared to the England average of 23.6%. To address this issue ‘Health Wise Doncaster’ has been established. This is a 12 week course for adults who want to lose weight and have a more active lifestyle.
  - On average 600 people die from smoking each year in Doncaster. To combat this, the Doncaster NHS Stop Smoking service has been established
  - Health inequalities within Doncaster are linked to deprivation. For example, the most deprived areas (Stainforth and Moorends) have nearly 7 years’ shorter life expectancy than the least deprived areas (Finningley).
  - In Mexborough (one of the 20% most deprived communities in Doncaster) there is a low uptake of cervical screening services, despite the rate for Doncaster being above the national level. The area also has high levels of deprivation in terms of employment, income and the living environment. It appears to have higher numbers of lone-parent households and lower car ownership. This makes it more difficult for people to access good health-care and nutrition. In recent years the nearby village of Rawmarsh (in Rotherham PCT) achieved national notoriety when mothers passed parcels from the local fish and chip shop to children at the secondary school who refused to eat a more nutritious school meal.
  - Access to nutrition may be linked to levels of education. Educational attainment is low in Doncaster, (57.8% A\*–C) compared to the average for England of 60.1%. In a survey in Doncaster, 14.5% of adult respondents said they regularly had five portions of fruit and vegetables a day, much lower than the England average of 23.7%.