



[www.nationalbreastfeedinghelpline.org.uk](http://www.nationalbreastfeedinghelpline.org.uk)

# Reaching & serving new parents during the pandemic



## What we do

The National Breastfeeding Helpline has always strived to provide an accessible service that is equal for all who need it. We are open from 9.30am-9.30pm 365 days a year.

We promote the helpline widely to families (e.g. including the number on postnatal discharge infosheets and on BadgerNet in Scotland) and the telephone service is a very low cost or free way to access high quality, evidence based, non-judgemental breastfeeding support and information.

We offer support in minority languages including Polish and Bengali, and have a live webchat service as well as a traditional telephone helpline. Since 2017 we have also offered 1 to 1 support via message on Instagram and Facebook.

## During the pandemic

Over the course of the pandemic, the demand for all our services increased significantly. We supported 72% more people between April 2020-March 2021 compared to the same period the year before.

During successive lockdowns, many new parents found themselves alone, feeling isolated and with nowhere to turn for support. Confusing or mixed messages about the safety of breastfeeding with Covid-19, and later around the vaccine caused considerable stress for many.

Although some found the pandemic had a positive impact on their breastfeeding experience, a study by Brown & Shenker (2021) found that 'those who had a more difficult breastfeeding experience were more likely to live in challenging circumstances. BAME women and those with a lower education were more likely to be represented in this group'.

Whereas in normal times, new parents would have regular visits from healthcare professionals, family, friends, and drop in groups to attend, almost none of this was available, and so the support offered by the helpline was even more important than usual. We put extra measures in place including additional social media and webchat volunteers plus a new option for callers to leave a voicemail and have their call returned later, with the aim of supporting more families.

Thank you for taking the time to call me back. I've been struggling with feeling alone and isolated with my newborn and every call to you has left me feeling empowered, informed and like I have a whole team behind me. You're wonderfully calm, informative and you help me make decisions rather than telling me what to do. Thank you for being there.

My baby was born at the start of the first lockdown and I called just after that. It was amazing to get through straight away. It helped with my feeding issue but also made me feel less lonely.

I had no breastfeeding support due to covid and the webchat saved my breastfeeding journey many times. Because of this I am now 8 months into breastfeeding my baby!

This helpline has been amazing in lockdown

It was amazing to still be able to get such a great level of support when it felt like all the other support a new mum needed was taken away. It helped me carry on breastfeeding when I was struggling and gave me someone to answer my questions when I felt alone.

## The situation in Scotland

We collect full postcode data (with consent) from Scottish families who contact us, which allows us to analyse this against the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.

This shows us that between October 2020 and March 2021:

- 27% of callers to our helpline
- 18% of those who use our web chat service
- 22% of those who contacted us via social media message

live in the two most deprived quintiles of Scotland.

There is more we can and will do to reach families in the most deprived areas of Scotland but having a range of options for contact does appear to be effective.

## References & further reading

[Brown & Shenker 2021: Experiences of breastfeeding during COVID-19: Lessons for future practical & emotional support](#)

[Parent-Infant Foundation: Babies in Lockdown report - Listening to parents to build back better](#)

'Since Coronavirus restrictions have been in place, it's been much more challenging for people to meet up with friends and peer supporters to discuss their breastfeeding journeys, or to ask for support. Thankfully, the National Breastfeeding Helpline – staffed by a truly inspiring group of volunteers – has been there to help fill that gap, with support from mothers who have breastfed and received extensive training. I encourage anyone who feels like they need support or reassurance on breastfeeding to give them a call.' Alison Thewliss MP

