

Intergrowth estimated fetal weight charts

Q&A to support trusts currently using the Intergrowth estimated fetal weight chart to answer questions from women, partners and families.

What are Intergrowth estimated fetal weight charts and how are they used?

The Intergrowth estimated fetal weight chart is a type of growth chart used during pregnancy to check how your baby is growing.

When you have an ultrasound, things like the baby's head, belly and leg bone are measured. From those measurements, the baby's weight can be estimated.

The estimated weight is then plotted on a growth chart which shows how your baby compares to others the same age. For example, if your baby is on the 50th percentile, they're in the middle – half of babies weigh more and half weigh less.

If a baby appears smaller than expected (below the 10th percentile) or larger than expected (above the 90th percentile), your maternity team may offer you closer monitoring so you can understand what this means and make decisions together about your care.

Growth charts can help spot growth problems early which allows your maternity team to respond quickly. This could help support earlier conversations about wellbeing and options for additional monitoring and potential early delivery, that may help reduce certain risks.

The Intergrowth estimated fetal weight chart is just one type of growth chart used across the NHS.

Why is the use of these charts being reviewed?

The Intergrowth estimated fetal weight chart may not identify some babies that are growing slower than expected.

If this is not detected, then additional monitoring might not be offered where it is appropriate. This additional monitoring may be important to help protect your baby's health.

Because this chart uses global growth standards, it may not always reflect growth patterns seen in the UK population.

Analysis shows that of over 3.27 million births in England, these charts identified an average of 7.5% of babies at birth as below the 10th centile (smaller than 90% of babies at that stage), compared to over 10% for other charts.

Other charts that perform better are available and in widespread use. Therefore, NHS England is telling trusts using Intergrowth charts to switch to other commonly used charts.

Is the NHS going to stop using these charts?

Yes. The Intergrowth estimated fetal weight charts are being withdrawn from use across the NHS in England.

The data currently available to us has been analysed and does not indicate that the use of these charts has resulted in an increased number of stillbirths or other poor outcomes, so these steps are being taken as a precaution. The Royal College of Obstetricians and

Gynaecologists will update their guidance to say that Intergrowth charts will not be used in the NHS.

[Insert trust name] will move to using a different chart [as soon as possible/ by xxxxx].

This change can't happen straight away as introducing a new growth chart takes time – it is very important that they are added safely into the electronic patient record system – but we will stop using the Intergrowth charts by March 2026.

Until this happens, we will continue to use the Intergrowth charts, but your care team will take extra steps to make sure your baby's growth is being monitored accurately. This means that if your baby's weight is in the lowest quarter of the normal range using Intergrowth, it will be replotted on an alternative chart, for example, a widely available, reliable electronic chart, provided by the World Health Organization. Babies whose weight is below the 10th centile on this chart will then be monitored following national guidance.

How do I know if my baby has been monitored using the Intergrowth chart?

There are several different types of growth chart used across the NHS, and the Intergrowth chart may not have been the one used for your scans.

You probably won't know which chart has been used and that's completely normal. [name of trust] has used this chart since [xxxx].

If you are worried or would like to find out, please speak to your midwife or doctor.

The most important thing is that your baby's growth is being checked carefully and, if the Intergrowth chart is being used as part of your care, extra steps will now be taken to make sure your baby is being monitored accurately until your local service moves to a different chart.

My baby has been monitored using the Intergrowth chart. What do I do next?

You do not need to do anything – your maternity team will take extra steps to make sure your baby is being accurately measured and monitored.

If you have any questions or would like to talk about what this means for you, please speak to your midwife or doctor.

How can I be confident that my baby is being measured accurately?

Following the decision to withdraw Intergrowth charts there is a clear process for moving to the use of other charts that will allow your babies weight to be plotted more accurately. Until a different chart is introduced, your care team will take extra steps to make sure your baby's growth is being monitored accurately.

Your maternity team will discuss your baby's growth with you if the fetal weight plots in the lowest 10% and talk about next steps. If you have any concerns, then it is important that you raise them with the team.

I had my baby some time ago. They were born at a small weight. Could this have been prevented?

Before birth, ultrasound measurements are used in some women to estimate your baby's weight. These estimates, along with growth charts, help the team monitor your baby's

wellbeing and may also lead to discussions with you about the best time for birth if your baby is smaller than expected.

These charts cannot prevent a baby from being born small - they are there to help detect a baby that is growing more slowly than expected so that options for additional monitoring and potential early delivery can be discussed with you.

My baby was stillborn. Could the use of this chart have impacted my baby?

If you did not have scans at the end of pregnancy, then this guidance would not have been used as part of your care or impacted on your baby.

The decision to stop using Intergrowth charts relates to detection of babies that are smaller than expected which is only one of a number of things that can lead to stillbirth. So, while it is unlikely that these charts impacted on what happened to your baby, we would encourage discussion with your maternity team to explore the causes further.

The Intergrowth estimated fetal weight charts are not being withdrawn because they have been shown to cause stillbirths.

Why is the deadline to stop using these charts 4 months away?

Introducing a new growth chart can take time because it is very important that they are added safely into the electronic patient record system.

While this happens we will continue to use the Intergrowth chart, but your care team will take extra steps to make sure your baby's growth is being monitored accurately.

These extra steps have been carefully planned to make sure your baby's growth is measured as accurately as possible. Everything being done follows guidance set by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists.

How did you find out there could be a problem with the use of these charts?

NHS England has written to us – and all other trusts across England – to ask us to move to an alternative chart as a precaution.

This followed analysis that shows the Intergrowth estimated fetal weight charts may under-detect some babies who are smaller than expected for their stage of pregnancy.

The data available to us does not indicate that this has resulted in stillbirths however, NHS England is continuing to analyse data to confirm whether the use of Intergrowth charts has led to an increase in stillbirth rates.

There are other charts that perform better, so as a precaution, NHS England is asking trusts using Intergrowth charts to switch to other commonly used charts.

Will the NHS be looking back at those who have experienced stillbirth to explore whether Intergrowth could have impacted the outcome?

NHS England is working with MBRRACE to review the 2024 data to assess whether stillbirth rates have increased in trusts using the Intergrowth charts.

MBRRACE is an NHS-linked programme that uses NHS data and expert reviews to study maternal and baby deaths to help improve the safety and quality of care across the NHS.

If a clear increase is identified, we will carry out further detailed work to understand whether the charts may be a contributing factor, including whether we need to consider Duty of Candour to be enacted and if we need to review individual cases where appropriate.