

treated asthma increased from 6.5% to 6.7% in men and from 6.4% to 6.9% in women (figures 2 and 3). However, rates were stable in children over this time period.

Time trends in treatment

Over the three year period 1994 to 1996, the proportion of patients with treated asthma who were prescribed both bronchodilators and inhaled corticosteroids or cromoglycate increased from 63% to 66%. The increase was most marked in children of pre-school age (figure 4).

In 1996, 65% of males and 67% of females with treated asthma were prescribed both bronchodilators and inhaled corticosteroids (or cromoglycate), 28% of males and 26% of females were prescribed bronchodilators alone and the remaining 7% were prescribed inhaled corticosteroids or cromoglycate alone.

Geographical regions

Analysis by former Regional Health Authority (RHA) areas for 1994 (figure 5) shows that there was relatively little geographical variation in prevalence of treated asthma. All regions are within 15% of the value for England & Wales. Age-standardised prevalence rates varied from 5.9% (SW Thames) to 7.1% (Mersey and East Anglian) for males and from 5.7% (NW Thames) to 7.4% (Mersey) for females.

Footnote

Most data presented in this factsheet are taken from Office for National Statistics, Key Health Statistics from General Practice 1996, Series MB6 No.1. London: The Stationery Office, 1998.

Results are based on data from a subset of 288 GPRD practices with a total practice population of 2.1 million patients (4% of the population of England and Wales). Only practices in England and Wales with complete data for the full three year period 1994-96 have been included. These practices are broadly geographically representative of the population of England and Wales, with levels of coverage varying from 2.8% (North Thames) to 5.3% (West Midlands). Smaller practices and practices in Inner London are under-represented.

Data in figure 5 are taken from Office for National Statistics, Key Health Statistics from General Practice, Studies on Medical and Population Subjects No. 60. London: The Stationery Office, 1997.

More detail is contained in "Prescribing for patients with asthma by general practitioners in England and Wales, 1994-96", Majeed A and Moser K, Health Statistics Quarterly, London: The Stationery Office.

Figure 4: Percentage of patients with treated asthma prescribed both bronchodilators and inhaled corticosteroids/cromoglycate, England & Wales, 1994-96.

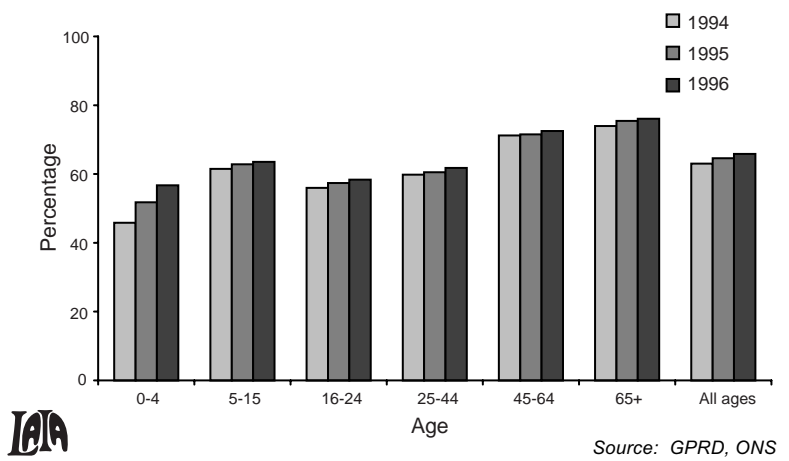
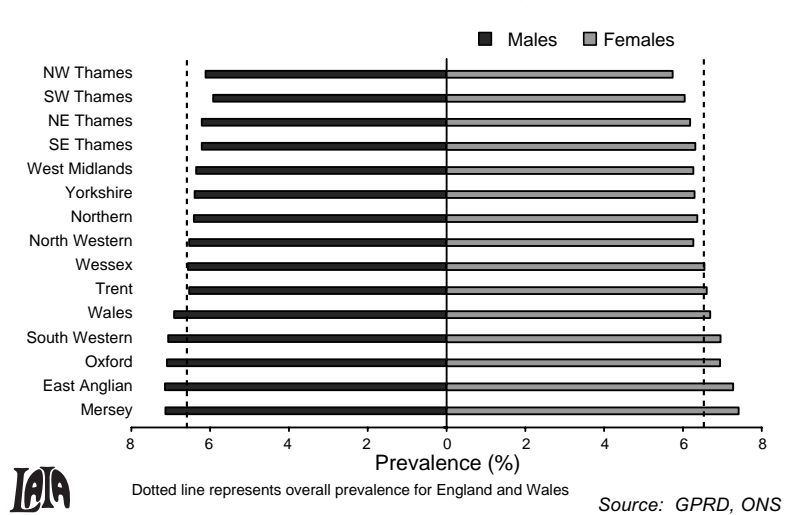


Figure 5: Age-standardised prevalence of treated asthma in England & Wales by sex and region in 1994.



Summary

- **The General Practice Research Database, covering over 3.5 million patients nationally, offers important information about the prevalence and drug treatment of asthma in primary care.**
- **The proportion of patients treated for asthma was similar in all regions of England and Wales.**
- **The prevalence of treated asthma was highest in children, affecting 12% of boys and 10% of girls aged 5-15. Throughout most of adult life, the prevalence was higher in women than in men.**
- **Between 1994-1996, the prevalence of treated asthma increased slightly in adults, particularly in women. The prevalence was stable in children.**
- **In 1996, about two-thirds of asthma patients were treated with both symptomatic ('reliever') and prophylactic ('preventer') medication and this proportion is tending to increase.**