



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

Iechyd Cyhoeddus  
Cymru  
Public Health  
Wales

# Commonly Identified Health Issues of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma Communities

A summary of a rapid desktop review of published literature. Including studies from Wales, UK and Europe.

Published data and evidence dated 2013 - 2025

## The Health of Individuals in the Gypsy, Traveller & Roma Communities



**70%** of Gypsy and Traveller communities rated their health as good or very good in the 2011 census, the lowest proportion across all respondents.

### Primary Care Engagement

**74** English GP practices refused registration to Romany or Traveller patients during the COVID 19 Pandemic

Individuals and families from Gypsy, Roma and Travelling communities experience difficulties engaging with primary care services for several reasons:

- Lack of cultural awareness among staff
- Low literacy skills in this group
- Previous experience of stigma, racism and discrimination



Individuals from Gypsy and Traveller communities are likely to die younger and will experience much poorer health across the life course when compared to the general population. However, these groups are less likely to receive responsive, ongoing and preventative care.

In Wales, Gypsy and Traveller communities experience a wide range of inequalities. Racism and discrimination faced by these communities is often overt, common and will be experienced across the life course.

**Primary care services have a responsibility to develop inclusive and accessible services that meet the need of this user group.**

Tools and resources have been developed to support.

## Morbidity



- Experience up to **6 years** less of living in good health when compared to general population
- **42%** of English Gypsies are affected by a long-term condition, as opposed to 18% of the general population

## Mortality



- Life expectancy is **10-12 years** shorter than the general population
- Infant mortality **3.6 times** higher in the Irish Traveller population compared to the general population
- **10%** of Irish Travellers do not reach the age of two

## Chronic Conditions

Gypsy, Traveller and Roma people are at increased risk of having one or more long-term health conditions. Health outcomes for this group are poorer when compared to the general population. The health of a person from a Romany or Traveller Community at 60 is comparable to a white British person aged 80.



**60%** of Roma communities in the UK reported poor physical health and are living with several chronic conditions:

- Cancer
- Diabetes
- Epilepsy
- Cardiovascular and respiratory conditions
- Multiple Sclerosis



Higher prevalence of type diabetes



More likely to experience respiratory disease and illness



**20.5%** living with multiple long-term conditions of which one is MSK (10% CI)



More likely to experience arthritis

## Lifestyle and Risk Factors

- **57%** of Gypsy Travellers smoke compared to 21.5% in comparator group
- High intake of energy drinks



## Communicable Disease

- These communities face an increased risk of infectious diseases and outbreaks within communities. Lower vaccination coverage, cultural factors, lack of trust, misinformation and a lack of data to identify these population groups to enable targeted immunisation programmes increase the risk.
- The environment in which some communities live will also increase risk of infection.



- Excess burden of Measles within this community
- Risk is **100 times** higher than the general population



- **3,000 families** in England living on unauthorised sites have limited or no access to basic water and sanitation. In January 2023, there were **139** caravans on unauthorised sites in Wales, these families may also be living with limited or no access to basic water and sanitation.
- Lack of knowledge on the risks and consequences of many diseases.

## Immunisation and Screening

- Misinformation particularly around MMR vaccine effect this community
- Concerns around vaccine safety and efficacy, particularly in relation to COVID 19
- Increased vaccine hesitancy for the HPV vaccine, belief it endorses sexual activity



## Maternal Health

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities experience maternal health inequalities. There is poorer uptake for maternal health care due to structural and cultural barriers to accessing pre and post natal care, particularly for families who are transient and of no fixed abode. Preventable and avoidable maternal mortality and morbidity is greater for this group.

There is a significant lack of research and evidence for this population group and maternal health.

**20x** more likely to experience death of a child as a mother

Excess prevalence of miscarriage in Gypsy Traveller communities **29%** compared to 16% in comparison

Higher rates of maternal death during pregnancy and shortly after childbirth

Roma mothers experience higher rates of poor infant health outcomes

Infant mortality is **3.6** times higher in the Irish Traveller population



## Mental Health

Poor mental health disproportionately affects Roma, Gypsy and Traveller communities. Evidence suggests everyday racism and discrimination faced by young people within these groups exacerbates poor mental health and wellbeing.



**3x** more likely to experience anxiety

**2x** more likely experience depression

Young people from these communities rated their life satisfaction the lowest of all ethnic groups

Mental health is increasingly affecting younger adults

Over representation of Irish Traveller community needing mental health support in prison settings



## Suicide and Self Harm

- **6x** more likely to die by suicide
- Male suicide rate was **6.6** times higher
- Female suicide rate was **4.9** times higher

## Trauma and Violence



**61%**

of women from English Gypsy communities had experience of domestic abuse

**81%**

of women from Irish Travelling communities had experience of domestic abuse

**62%**

of Gypsies and Travellers experienced racial abuse

**47%**

of Roma people have been racially assaulted

**35%**

of people from Roma communities have been physically attacked