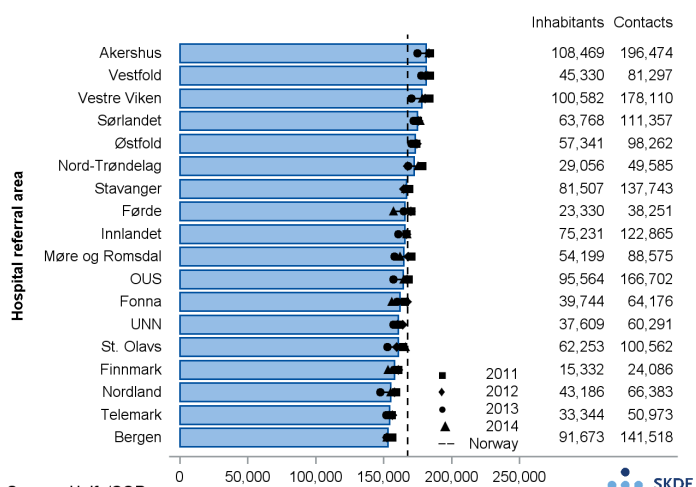


Doctor's consultations for children under the age of 16 years are covered in full by the Norwegian Health Economics Administration (HELFO) with no patient charges. The GPs have primary responsibility for children's health services and refer them to the specialist health service if the GP or the parents want a specialist assessment. Children are seen by emergency primary healthcare services outside of ordinary working hours, and the emergency primary healthcare services are responsible for a high proportion of emergency care referrals to the specialist health service.

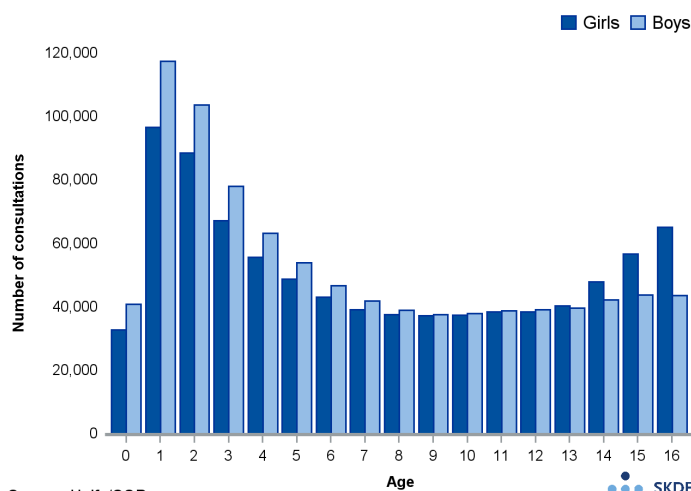
Sample

The sample consists of children's daytime GP consultations or emergency primary healthcare consultations. Telephone consultations or routine visits to well baby clinics/public health centres are not included.

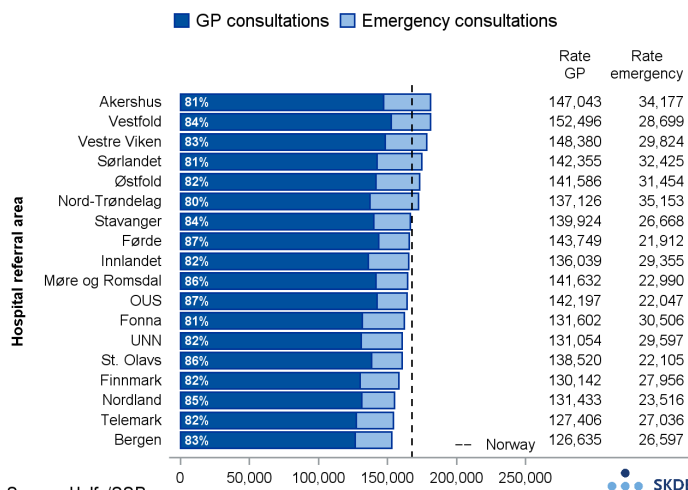
In 2014, 65% of all children had at least one primary healthcare consultation, which means that the average number of consultations for children who were in contact with the primary healthcare service this year was 2.6 consultations. Around 9% of the children had five consultations or more, and 1% saw a GP more than 11 times in the course of the year.



Source: Helfo/SSB
Primary healthcare consultations, age-adjusted usage rates per 100,000 children 0-16 year, per hospital referral area, per year and as an average for the period 2011-2014.



Source: Helfo/SSB
Primary healthcare consultations, number of treatments, age and gender, as an average for the period 2011-2014.



Source: Helfo/SSB
Primary healthcare consultations, daytime GP consultations and emergency primary healthcare consultations, age-adjusted usage rates per 100,000 children 0-16 year, per hospital referral area and as an average for the period 2011-2014.

Comments

The Norwegian primary healthcare system delivers approx. 1.8 million consultations to children aged 0-16 years each year. This gives an annual usage rate of 168,000 consultations per 100,000 children. This means that, on average, each child has 1.7 primary healthcare consultations per year. Approximately 17% of these consultations are emergency primary healthcare consultations.

The number of consultations is highest among the youngest children, and slightly more boys than girls in the youngest age groups have primary healthcare consultations. From the age of 14 years, girls are more often in contact with the primary healthcare service.

Overall, there is little variation in usage rates between hospital referral areas. The primary healthcare usage rate for children is 17-18% higher in the hospital referral areas with the highest usage rates than in the areas with the lowest rates.

Although variation is low, there is reason to discuss whether the overall use of health services is proportional to the disease burden in the child population. It is probable that many of the children's primary healthcare consultations concern common conditions such as infections, mild eczema, allergies etc. Society's increasing focus on risk probably lowers the threshold for seeking medical attention. It is natural for parents of young children to feel uncertain when the child has a fever and is ill, but there is reason to ask whether the information provided to parents about how to assess sick children is adequate and balanced. Kindergartens and schools' demands for medical examinations probably also contribute to the high use of health services.

The use of primary healthcare services is not to any significant extent limited by availability or financial factors, and this probably contributes to the high use of primary healthcare services in a presumably healthy child population. Our figures show no tendency towards the primary healthcare service replacing specialist healthcare.