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Exclusive National NSW Babies

# Experts feared birth numbers would fall after the pandemic. Instead, they surged

By [Lucy Carroll](#) and [Caitlin Fitzsimmons](#)

June 20, 2021 – 12:00am

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A bumper crop of babies conceived during the first COVID-19 lockdown last year resulted in the busiest start to the year for NSW public maternity wards in the past decade.

The latest figures from the Bureau of Health Information's Quarterly Report show 18,708 babies were born through public maternity services in NSW between January and March; 981 more than the same time last year, or a 5.5 per cent increase.

It is the most number of births for a first quarter and the second highest for any quarter since reporting began in 2010.



Jagwinder Kaur with her baby Gurmehar in her Sydney home. JANIE BARRETT

Figures from NSW Births, Deaths and Marriages back up the hospital data and show most of the growth has come from regional NSW.

Liz Allen, a demographer at the Australian National University, said the increase in births went against predictions of a post-pandemic birth slump.

“Unlike people were expecting, evidence suggests the feared baby bust did not eventuate in NSW - at least for the first part of this year,” Dr Allen said.

She cautioned that while the raw birth numbers were significant, it did not reveal much about overall trends in fertility because it did not account for factors such as the number of women of child-bearing age.

Economic uncertainty usually leads to lower birth rates and last June the Brookings Institution in the United States predicted COVID-19 would probably lead to a large and long-term baby bust globally.

[On Thursday figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics](#) showed the number of babies born in 2020 fell to a 13-year low, amid an overall population growth slump because of loss of immigration.

The hospital and birth registration data suggests this trend has reversed in 2021, at least in NSW.

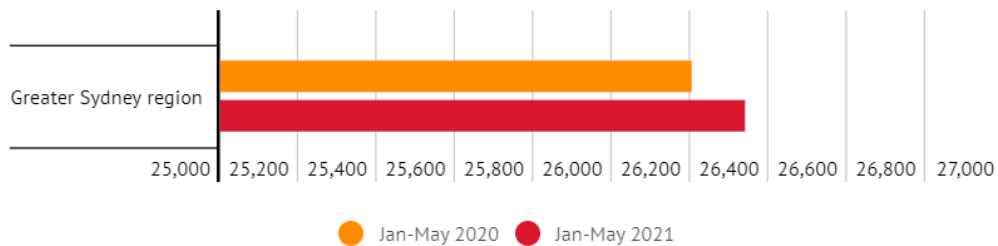
“People may have delayed having children at first onset of COVID-19 in Australia when there was huge uncertainty about how the pandemic would unfold,” Dr Allen said. “But as months went on and confidence grew, I suspect that is now reflected in the data.”

NSW Births, Deaths and Marriages data provided to *The Sun-Herald* showed birth registrations for January to May topped 40,262 across the state, 2 per cent higher than the same five months in 2020. In Greater Sydney the increase was only 1 per cent, but in regional NSW it was 5 per cent. Births must be registered within 60 days.

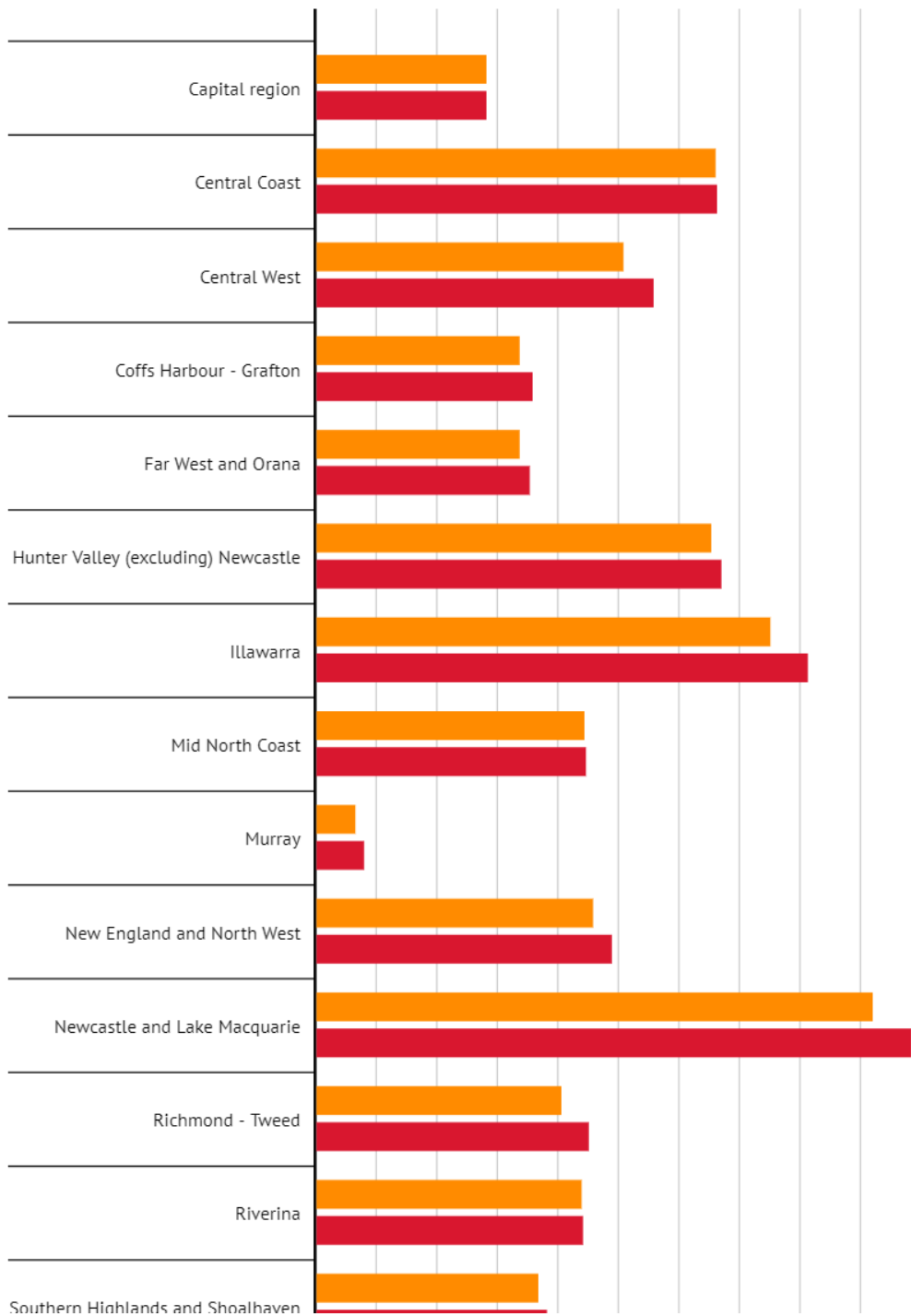
### Coming back with a boom

Birth registrations over the past 2 years (January to May for each year)

Sydney



## Regional NSW



The regions with the biggest rise in birth registrations included the Richmond-Tweed region on the north coast and the Central West, up 11 and 10 per cent respectively.

The hospitals data showed the busiest maternity wards in Sydney in the first quarter included Northern Beaches Hospital with a 31 per cent annual increase in babies, and Royal Hospital for Women in Randwick and Fairfield Hospitals both with an 11 per cent increase.

However, Royal Prince Alfred in Camperdown and Blacktown Hospital saw fewer births, reflecting the trend for Sydney hospitals overall.

Talat Uppal, a consultant obstetrician at Women's Health Road in Frenchs Forest, said she was much busier this year compared to last.

“In my practice we've seen that the number of births go up in January and February by at least 20 per cent compared to last year,” Dr Uppal said. “Patients tell me they've had more time to think about starting a family during the pandemic.”

This is reflected in demand for IVF treatment as well. Fertility clinic Genea reports a 15 per cent increase in the number of IVF procedures nationwide since the start of the pandemic.

Jagwinder Kaur, 25, from Dee Why, gave birth to her daughter Gurmehar in February this year.

Ms Kaur said she and her husband already planned to try for a baby last year and “the pandemic didn’t change our minds”. But she said being pregnant during the pandemic was difficult because of the restrictions, and her parents in Punjab had only met the baby on a video call.

Gurmehar was born six weeks early and was in a neonatal intensive care unit for almost a month.

“When I arrived at the hospital they were so busy and the neonatal ward has at least three new babies arriving every day,” said Ms Kaur.

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