

STATISTICS PRESS NOTICE – Excess deaths and Covid-19 related deaths in Northern Ireland: March-December 2020



9:30am Thursday 4th March 2021

Excess deaths and Covid-19 related deaths: March – December 2020

Latest figures published today by NISRA show that there were 1,958 excess deaths from 1st March to 31st December 2020, 15.4% above expected levels. The figures also show that in the same period, there were 1,903 Covid-19 related deaths.

Excess deaths are a mathematical concept based on the difference between actual deaths from all causes in a period minus the expected number of deaths based on the average deaths for the same period over the last five years.

The number of excess deaths for males (1,045) is higher than that for females (913), whilst the number of Covid-19 related deaths is slightly lower (948 male compared to 955 female deaths).

Three-quarters of excess deaths (74.9%) and Covid-19 related deaths (77.8%) are accounted for by those aged 75 and over. In this age group, the number of excess deaths were 17.9% above expected levels, compared to 15.4% for all ages. The highest excess deaths as a proportion of expected levels were found for those aged 55 to 64 (older working age) in both males (21.6%) and females (18.7%).

The number of deaths in hospitals was slightly higher (+1.8%) than expected levels, as a combined effect of 1,156 Covid-19 related deaths occurring in hospitals but 1,046 fewer non Covid-19 deaths in hospital. In contrast, there were more non Covid-19 deaths occurring at home: combined with the 119 Covid-19 related deaths at home, this resulted in the majority of excess deaths (1,395 or 71.3%) occurring at home.

Belfast LGD had the largest number of excess deaths (310), accounting for 15.8% of excess deaths in Northern Ireland. However, Antrim & Newtownabbey LGD had the highest excess deaths as a proportion above expected levels (28.1%), while Derry City & Strabane LGD had the lowest (7.4%).

Excess deaths were highest in the two least deprived areas, with around a 19% increase in deaths in both, compared to expected levels.

In the first three months of the pandemic (March to May 2020), Covid-19 was found to be the underlying cause for 706 deaths, accounting for 79.0% of the 894 excess deaths in that period. Deaths due to malignant neoplasm (+6.8%) and dementia/Alzheimer's disease (+13.1%) were above historical levels, whilst there were fewer respiratory deaths (-14.3%) compared to the previous five years.

NISRA

March 2021

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The full report and detailed tables are available at:
<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/excess-mortality-covid-19-related-deaths>
2. Statistics on weekly deaths registered in Northern Ireland can be found at:
<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/weekly-deaths>
3. All media queries to Department of Finance Press Office at dof.pressoffice@finance-ni.gov.uk. The Executive Information Service operates an out of hours service **for media enquiries only** between 1800hrs and 0800hrs Monday to Friday and at weekends and public holidays. The duty press officer can be contacted on 028 9037 8110.
4. These provisional statistics are based on death registration information collected by the General Register Office. The occurrence based statistics (to end December 2020) take into account registrations up to 17th February 2021, to allow for delays in death registrations.
5. Excess mortality can be used to measure of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, as it does not rely on the availability or interpretation of the (primary and secondary) causes of death. It captures deaths from all causes, which may be related to a range of factors associated with the pandemic, for example, changes in the availability or uptake of health care services including screening and diagnosing, or the impact of 'lock-down' on people's mental health. Some of these effects may take months or years to be fully understood.
6. Excess mortality is the difference between actual deaths from all causes in a period minus the expected number of deaths, which is based on the number of deaths in the previous five years. It is therefore a mathematical concept; it is not possible to identify if an individual death was an excess death. In contrast, the analysis of Covid-19 related deaths to which this report makes comparisons, is based on individual deaths where Covid-19 was included on the death certificate. These cannot be automatically classed as 'excess deaths'. Therefore the two analyses should not be combined or differenced as this will not yield valid conclusions.
7. Covid-19 related deaths are all deaths where Covid-19 was mentioned on the death certificate by the doctor who certified the death, whether or not Covid-19 was the primary underlying cause of death. The figures include cases where the doctor noted that there was suspected or probable coronavirus infection involved in the death.
8. The identification of the underlying or main cause of death (coding) of deaths occurring from March to December 2020 has not been completed yet. Such information for deaths registered up to 31st December 2020 is due to be published on 24th March 2021.
9. Further information on the statistics provided in this publication can be obtained from NISRA Customer Services at:

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