

STATISTICS PRESS NOTICE – Excess mortality and Covid-19 related deaths in Northern Ireland: March 2020 to December 2021



9:30am Thursday 24 February 2022

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) has today published a report on excess mortality and Covid-19 related deaths in Northern Ireland up to December 2021.

This shows that there were 3,269 excess deaths from March 2020 to December 2021, 11.3% above expected levels. The figures also show that in the same period, there were 4,036 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 previous five years.

Just under three-quarters of excess deaths (72.7%) and Covid-19 related deaths (73.5%) were those aged 75 and over.

The number of deaths in hospitals was higher (+4.5%) than expected levels, as a net effect of 2,871 Covid-19 related deaths occurring in hospitals but 2,207 fewer non Covid-19 deaths in hospital. In contrast, there were more non Covid-19 deaths occurring at home: combined with the 319 Covid-19 related deaths at home, this resulted in the majority of excess deaths (2,620 or 80.4%) occurring at home, an increase of 32.4% above historic levels.

Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon LGD had the largest number of excess deaths (435 or 15.0% above expected levels). Antrim & Newtownabbey LGD had the highest excess deaths as a proportion above expected levels (15.6%), while Belfast LGD had the lowest (6.4%).

Excess deaths were higher in rural areas (15.3%) compared to urban areas (9.4% above historic levels). This was most notable in the second half of 2021, where the number of deaths in rural areas was 23.3% above expected levels.

In the first two waves of the pandemic (March 2020 to June 2021), the number of deaths where Covid-19 was found to be the underlying cause (2,592) exceeded excess mortality in this period (2,112). Noteworthy levels of excess deaths were found for diseases of the digestive system (114 or 10.5% above historical levels) and malignant neoplasm (143 or 2.4% above historical levels).

NISRA

February 2022

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-december-2021>
2. Statistics on weekly deaths registered in Northern Ireland can be found at: <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/death-statistics/weekly-death-registrations-northern-ireland>
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 2021) take into account registrations up to 9 February 2022, 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. At present, it is not possible to identify the underlying or main cause of deaths that occurred up to December 2021, but were registered in 2022 or indeed which have yet to be registered. This limited the analysis of excess deaths by cause of death of those that occurred in the second half of 2021.
9. This report was created within the Administrative Data Research Northern Ireland (ADR NI), a partnership between the Administrative Data Research Centre Northern Ireland (ADRC NI), and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). Together they support the acquisition, linking and analysis of administrative data sets, developing cutting-edge research to improve knowledge, policymaking and public service delivery.
10. Further information on the statistics provided in this publication can be obtained from NISRA Customer Services at:

Telephone: +44 (0)300 200 7836

E-mail: demography@nisra.gov.uk

Responsible Statistician: Dr Jos Ijpelaar