

STATISTICS PRESS NOTICE – DRUG-RELATED AND DRUG MISUSE DEATHS IN NORTHERN IRELAND, 2023



9:30am Wednesday 05 March 2025

Drug-related and drug misuse deaths in Northern Ireland, 2023

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) has today published statistics for deaths in Northern Ireland due to drug-related and drug misuse causes in 2023.

Figures show there were 169 drug related deaths registered in 2023; a 47% increase on the total registered a decade ago. Since 2013, Northern Ireland has seen registered deaths due to drug-related causes rise from 115 to a peak of 218 in 2020 and then falling to 169 in 2023. It is important to note that registration-based figures build in delays arising from system wide processes which can drive annual fluctuations in the series.

Considering a three-year average trend, the average number of drug-related deaths rose from 109.0 in 2013 to 207.3 in 2021, falling to 178.7 in 2023.

The number of drug misuse deaths (a sub-set of drug-related deaths) has similarly increased over time from 79 in 2013 to 180 in 2021 and 146 in 2023.

Similar to previous years, males accounted for approximately two-thirds (65.1 per cent) of drug-related deaths in 2023.

Looking at the number of deaths by age, the 25-34 age group had the highest crude drug-related mortality rate in 2023, at 21.6 per 100,000 population and the highest crude mortality rate of drug misuse deaths at 19.6 per 100,000 population.

The average age-standardised drug-related death rate for 2021 to 2023 was 9.7 deaths per 100,000, the lowest average rate since 2019. The comparable average rate for drug misuse deaths was 8.2 deaths per 100,000. Prior to this, the three-year average age-standardised mortality rate (ASMR) for both drug-related deaths and drug misuse deaths peaked in 2021 at 11.2 and 9.5 per 100,000 respectively.

Similar to previous years, the drug group mentioned most often in drug-related deaths was opioids, appearing in 103 cases in 2023. However, Pregabalin was the specific drug mentioned most often, mentioned in 67 of the 169 deaths registered in 2023.

The percentage of drug-related deaths also involving alcohol has been declining over the last decade, from 28.7 per cent in 2013 to 18.3 per cent in 2023.

Almost three-quarters (74.6 per cent) of drug-related deaths in 2023 involved two or more drugs. In contrast in 2013, 53.0 per cent of drug-related deaths involved two or more drugs.

Cocaine emerged as the predominant substance mentioned in deaths involving only one drug in 2023, contributing to 5.9 per cent of total drug-related deaths (169) and 35.7 per cent (10) of single-drug deaths (28).

Belfast Local Government District (LGD) had the highest number of drug-related deaths (63). Drug-related and drug misuse deaths continue to be higher in areas of highest deprivation.

March 2025

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. Statistics on drug-related deaths registered in Northern Ireland can be found at: [Drug-Related Deaths | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#)
2. Statistics on alcohol-specific deaths in Northern Ireland were published in December 2023 and can be found at: [Alcohol Deaths | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#)
3. Drug-related deaths are defined when the underlying cause of death recorded on the death certificate is drug poisoning, drug abuse or drug dependence. Drug-misuse deaths occur where the underlying cause is drug poisoning, drug abuse or drug dependence or where any of the substances controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act (1971) are involved. Further information can be found at: [Drug Related Deaths, Northern Ireland: Information Paper | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#)
4. Due to an error in the classification of Pregabalin and Gabapentin in previous reports (not counted in drug misuse deaths) a correction has been made to the number of drug misuse deaths from 2020 to 2022 previously published.
5. Information on the areas of deprivation is taken from the Northern Ireland Multiple deprivation measures (NIMDM 2017) and can be found at: [Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2017 \(NIMDM2017\) | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#)

6. All media queries should be directed to Department of Finance Press Office at dof.pressoffice@finance-ni.gov.uk or calling 028 90816724. 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.

7. Further information on the statistics provided in this publication can be obtained from NISRA Customer Services at:

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