

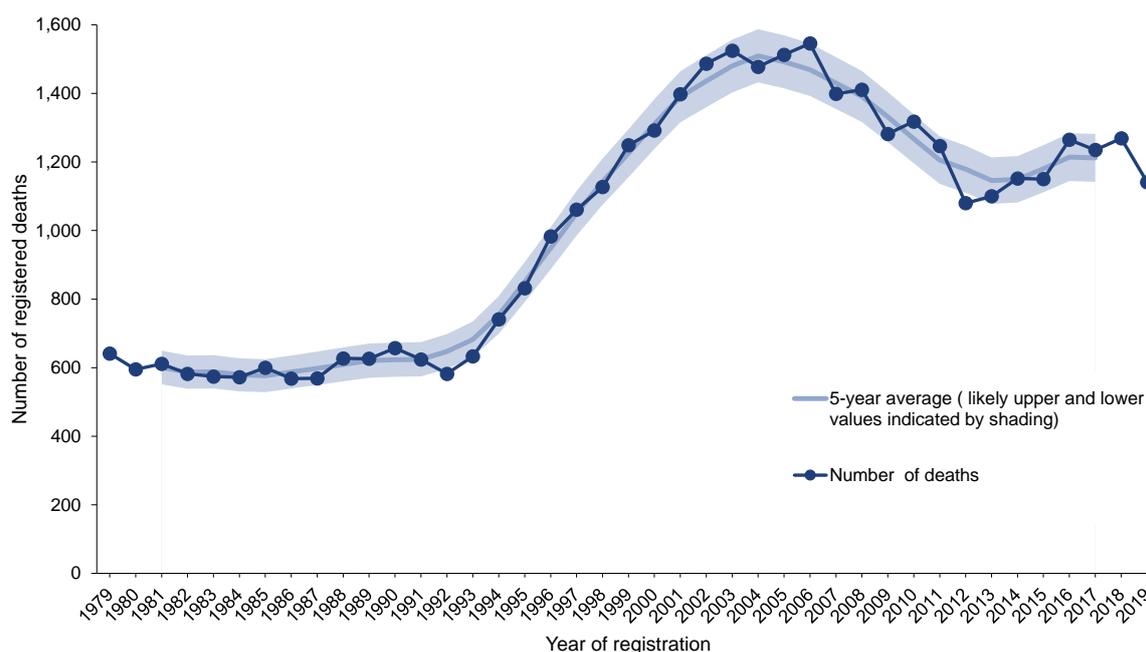
Main points

In 2019, there were 1,141 alcohol-related deaths, on the basis of the old National Statistics definition (details of which are given in the [methodology document](#)). This was 128 (10%) fewer than in the previous year. The 1,269 alcohol-related deaths in 2018 had been the highest annual total since 2010, when 1,318 deaths were registered (but was only slightly more than the 1,265 registered in 2016). The 2019 figure of 1,141 was the lowest since 2013, when 1,100 alcohol-related deaths were registered (but was only slightly fewer than the 1,152 and 1,150 registered in 2014 and 2015, respectively).

The number of alcohol-related deaths was relatively stable, at roughly 600 per year, during the 1980s. Thereafter, the general trend seems to have been rapid increases during the 1990s and early 2000s, to around 1,500 per year in the mid-2000s. The figure of 1,546 in 2006 was the largest so far recorded. For the next six years, the general trend was downward, reaching a recent low of 1,080 in 2012. Thereafter, increases in four of the next six years (including a large one in 2016) and a rise in the 5-year moving average suggested that the general trend had changed, and was now upwards. However, that may no longer be the case, given the large fall in 2019.

These figures may fluctuate from year to year. [Chart 1](#) shows the number for each year, together with the 5-year moving annual average (as an indication of any overall trend) and the likely range of statistical variability around it (which is explained in '[Alcohol Deaths - Methodology](#)'). It will be seen that almost all the year-to-year fluctuations over the period since 1979 have been within what would be expected to be the likely range of statistical variability around the general trends described earlier.

Chart 1: Alcohol-related deaths registered in Scotland, 1979 to 2019



Minimum unit pricing for alcohol was implemented in Scotland on 1 May 2018, with a minimum price of 50p per unit. There was a 3% increase in the number of alcohol-related deaths between 2017 and 2018, but it is difficult to assess the impact of the policy change from this dataset alone. Firstly, the figure for 2018 as a whole included deaths which were registered in four months (January to April 2018) in which there was no minimum unit price for the sale of alcohol. Secondly, a 3% change is well within the expected range of year-to-year fluctuations in this data series over the years. The figure for 2019 provides stronger evidence of a genuine impact. However, the 10% fall in alcohol-related deaths between 2018 and 2019 is just within the maximum expected year-to-year fluctuation.

To explain this in more detail, if the underlying rate of such deaths were 1,212 per year, which is the latest value of the 5-year moving average, one would expect natural ‘random’ variation to produce an annual number of deaths that was between roughly 1,142 and about 1,282 in 19 out of 20 years. Therefore, the fall from 1,269 in 2018 to 1,141 in 2019 was from just below the likely upper end of the range to just below the likely lower end, and so was similar to the maximum expected year-to-year fluctuation.

In summary, although an annual decrease of this magnitude is notable, further years will be required to see if this reduction continues and conclude that this is a sustained shift in alcohol-related deaths in Scotland.

[Table 1](#) shows that the 1,141 alcohol-related deaths in 2019 consisted of 728 male deaths and 413 female deaths. Over the years since 1979, there have been roughly twice as many male deaths as female deaths, with the two figures tending to rise and fall together (although there have been some exceptions, as the male : female ratio, which was about 1.8:1 in 2019, has been as low as 1.4:1 and as high as 2.4:1).

In 2019, there were 131 alcohol-related deaths of people in the 30-44 age-group, 10 fewer than in 2018 and the fifth lowest figure since 1993 (when there were 97 alcohol-related deaths of 30-44 year olds, the lowest number since then being 120 in 2017). The number of deaths of people aged 45-59 was 432, 65 fewer than in 2018, previously having not changed much for several years (it was between 472 and 503 in each year from 2013 to 2018), and the second lowest figure since 1995 (when there were 353 alcohol-related deaths of 45-59 year olds, the lowest number since then being 420 in 2012). There was a fall of 44 in deaths of 60-74 year olds, to 441, ending a run of five consecutive increases (from 359 in 2013 to 485 in 2018, which was the highest figure for that age-group since 2006, when it was 523). The 127 deaths of people aged 75 and over was 11 fewer than in 2018, but still the fourth highest number ever recorded for that age-group (the largest figure being 147 in 2016). There were 10 deaths aged under 30, two more than in 2018 (deaths in this age group have fluctuated between 8 and 19 over the last decade). The table shows that the 45-59 age-group has had the largest number of alcohol-related deaths in almost every year since 1979.

The final three columns of the table show the average age at death for alcohol-related deaths: in 2019, this was 59.8 years, and it was slightly higher for males (60.3) than for females (59.1). It did not change much over the period from 1979 to 2013 (while there were year to year fluctuations, it remained between a lowest value of 55.6 in 1999 and what was, at the time, a highest value of 58.3 in both 1982 and 2012). However, the average age at death seems to have been increasing recently, as its six largest values have been in the six latest years (2014: 58.5; 2015: 58.7; 2016: 59.7; 2017: 59.9; 2018: 60.1; 2019: 59.8).

[Table 2](#) and [Table 3](#) give figures for each NHS Board area and council. As the figures can fluctuate markedly from year to year, 3-and 5-year averages are shown for NHS Boards and 5-year averages are shown for councils. They should indicate better any overall trend in the figures for any given area.