

Vital Events – Deaths - Accidental Deaths - 2020

Main points

Accidental deaths include:

- Accidental Poisoning (such as toxic gas and accidental drug/alcohol deaths)
- Falls
- Transport accidents
- Exposure to smoke or fire
- Exposure to forces of nature
- Drownings
- Other deaths specified as accidental on the death certificate

Trends in Accidental Deaths

- Between the late 1970s and the late 1990s, the number of accidental deaths in Scotland almost halved.
- Numbers were relatively stable for the next 15 years but since 2012 accidental deaths have been increasing. This increase was mostly caused by a large increase in deaths by accidental poisoning.
- Males have consistently had a higher number of accidental deaths than females.

Accidental Deaths in 2020

- There were 2,759 accidental deaths registered in Scotland, accounting for 4% of all deaths in 2020 (64,093). This is an increase of 33 (1%) compared with 2019.

Accidental Poisoning

- The most common cause of accidental death in Scotland in 2020 was accidental poisoning by and exposure to noxious substances (1,373, 50% of all accidental deaths in 2020).
- This is an increase of 113 deaths (9%) compared to 2019.
- Accidental poisonings overtook falls as the most common cause of accidental death in 2018 and this has continued through to 2020.

Falls

- The second most common cause of accidental death in Scotland was falls (948, 34% of all accidental deaths in 2020).
- This is an increase of 80 deaths (8%) compared to 2019.

Transport Accidents

- Deaths from transport accidents have fallen in recent years, and in 2020, have reached their lowest level since records began.
- 150 people died from transport accidents in 2020 (5% of all accidental deaths).
- This is a decrease of 39 deaths (21%) compared to 2019.

Age

- The 85+ age group had most deaths out of all age groups, accounting for 22% of deaths.
- There were also a large number of deaths in the age groups 35-39, 40-44, 45-49 and 50-54 which, when combined together, accounted for 34.4% of all deaths.

Sex

- Of the 2,759 accidental deaths recorded in 2020, 1,046 were female (38%) and 1,713 male (62%).

Deprivation

- People in the most deprived areas (103 per 100,000 population) are more than 4 times as likely to have an accidental death than those in the least deprived areas (25 per 100,000 population).

Notes on methodology changes

There have been methodology and procedural changes which affect the comparability of accidental death statistics over time. Please refer to the [methodology document](#) for more details.