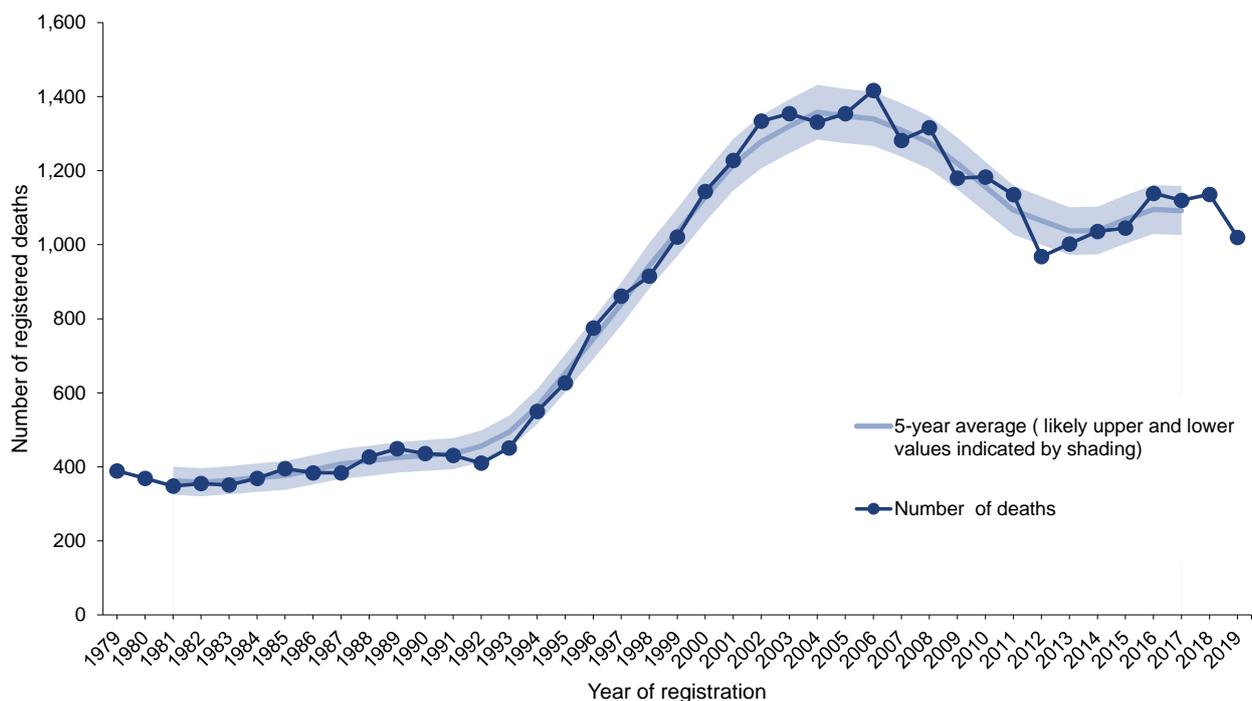


## Alcohol-specific deaths: main points

- There were 1,020 alcohol-specific deaths registered in Scotland in 2019, 10% fewer than in 2018 and the lowest annual total since 2013 (1,002).
- 2019 represents the first substantial decrease in recent years, after a period of general increase since 2012. It also represents 28% fewer deaths than the peak of 1,417 registered in 2006.
- Males accounted for nearly two-thirds (65%) of alcohol-specific deaths in 2019. Over the years since 1979, there have usually been at least twice as many male deaths as female deaths.
- Most alcohol-specific deaths are of people in their 50s and 60s (591, or 58% of the total in 2019). Over the latest five years, 55-59 was the age-group with the largest number, with an average of 182 deaths per year. The average age of alcohol-specific deaths has increased over the last decade or so: it was around 55 for many years but has risen to around 59 more recently.
- Minimum unit pricing for alcohol was implemented in Scotland on 1 May 2018. The figure for 2019 shows a considerable fall in the number of alcohol-specific deaths since 2018. There have only been three other occasions (since the beginning of this data series in 1979) where there has been a reduction in alcohol-specific deaths of around 10% or more in a single year (in 2007, 2009 and 2012). However, 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-specific deaths in Scotland.

## Alcohol-specific deaths, 1979 to 2019



## Contents

1. Overall number, and trends.....	2
2. Sex and age.....	3
3. Other points.....	4

### 1. Overall number, and trends

In 2019, there were 1,020 alcohol-specific deaths, on the basis of the new National Statistics (NS) definition, details of which are given in the [methodology document](#). This was a fall of 116 (10%) compared with the previous year, and the lowest figure since 2013 (when there were 1,002 such deaths). The total for 2019 was also lower than in every year from 1999 to 2011, inclusive.

The number of alcohol-specific deaths was relatively stable, at around 350-400 per year, from 1979 to 1987, and then remained between about 400 and 450 per year from 1988 to 1993. Thereafter, the general trend seems to have been rapid increases during the late 1990s and early 2000s, to a peak of 1,417 in 2006. These were followed by reductions to 968 in 2012 (the lowest figure since 1998, when there were 915 alcohol-specific deaths). Since 2012, the general trend had been upward, with the slight fall in 2017 appearing to be due to the figure for 2016 being unusually high (when compared to what would have been expected from the general trend since 2012). 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 2000 have been within what would be expected to be the likely range of statistical variability around the general trend described earlier.

Minimum unit pricing for alcohol was implemented in Scotland on 1 May 2018, with a minimum price of 50p per unit. There was a 1% increase in the number of alcohol-specific 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 1% change is well within the expected range of year-to-year fluctuations in this data series over the years. Although, the figure for 2019 provides stronger evidence of an impact, the 10% fall in alcohol-specific 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 1,092 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 1,026 and about 1,158 in 19 out of 20 years. Therefore, the fall from 1,136 in 2018 to 1,020 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-specific deaths in Scotland.

## 2. Sex and age

[Table 1](#) shows that there were 659 male and 361 female alcohol-specific deaths in 2019. Males accounted for just under two-thirds (65%) of the 1,020 deaths, representing a male : female ratio of 1.8:1. Over the years since 1979, there have usually been at least 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 has been as low as 1.5:1 and as high as 2.4:1).

Most alcohol-specific deaths are of people in their 50s and 60s. In 2019, there were 164 alcohol-specific deaths of people aged 55-59 (43 fewer than in 2018), 148 in the 60-64 age-group (nine fewer than in 2018), 143 aged 65-69 (12 fewer than in 2018) and 136 of 50-54 year olds (10 fewer than in 2018). There were also 108 deaths of people aged 45-49 (four fewer than in 2018, and the lowest number since 1996, when there were 104), 102 deaths of 70-74 year olds (19 fewer than in 2018, but still the second largest number recorded), 69 at ages 40-44 (two fewer than in 2018), 43 who were 75-79 (14 fewer than in 2018), 37 aged 35-39 (nine fewer than in 2018), and smaller numbers in each of the other age-groups – see [Table 3](#).

As the numbers of alcohol-specific deaths by age may fluctuate from year to year, 5-year moving annual averages (shown in the lower half of [Table 3](#)) may provide a better guide as to the scale of the problem for different age-groups. For the period from 2015 to 2019, the annual average numbers of alcohol-specific deaths were: 182 per year for ages 55-59; 158 per year for ages 60-64; 157 per year for ages 65-69 (the largest ever 5-year moving average for this age-group); 153 per year for ages 50-54 (the lowest 5-year moving average for this age-group since 141 per year for the period 1995 to 1999); 120 per year for ages 45-49 (this age-group's smallest average value since 117 per year for the period from 1995 to 1999); 98 per year for ages 70-74 (the largest ever 5-year moving average for this age-group); 69 per year for ages 40-44 (this age-group's smallest average value since 69 per year for the period from 1993 to 1997); 53 per year for ages 75-79 (the second largest ever 5-year moving average for this age-group); and 36 per year for ages 35-39 (this age-group's smallest average value since 33 per year for the period from 1992 to 1996). The numbers for the other age-groups were smaller.

The final column of [Table 3](#) shows the average age at death for alcohol-specific deaths: in 2018, this was 58.6 years. It did not change much over the period from 1981 to 2010: while there were year to year fluctuations, it remained between about 54½ and 56½ years (the lowest value in the period was 54.4 and the highest 56.3). However, it seems to have increased recently, as the six largest values are in the six latest years (2014: 57.3; 2015: 57.9; 2016: 58.7; 2017: 58.9; 2018: 59.3; 2019: 58.6) and a 5-year moving average shows a slight upward trend (it was between 54.7 and 55.7 for the periods which were centred on the years from 1981 to 2008, but then rose fairly steadily to 58.7 for the period centred on 2017).

Tables 3M and 3F provide breakdowns by age-group and average age for male and female alcohol-specific deaths. In 2019, the average age at death was higher for males (59.3 years) than for females (57.4 years). Indeed, in each year from 2000, the average age of alcohol-specific deaths was higher for males than for females, although in some years there was only a slight difference between the averages for the two sexes.

### **3. Other points**

In terms of the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, Tenth Revision (ICD-10), the main underlying causes of the alcohol-specific deaths that have been registered since 2000 are alcoholic liver disease (code 'K70': 660 deaths in 2019) and mental and behavioural diseases due to use of alcohol (code 'F10': 272 deaths in 2019): no other cause of death has accounted for 100+ deaths in any one year. [Table 2](#) provides more details, including breakdowns of the individual causes of death within 'alcoholic liver disease' and 'mental and behavioural disorders due to use of alcohol'.

[Tables 4](#) and [Table 5](#) give figures for each NHS Board area and Council. As the figures for some areas can fluctuate markedly from year to year, the 5-year moving annual averages should indicate better any overall trend.