

Deaths involving coronavirus (COVID-19) in Scotland by ethnicity recorded at death registration

Purpose

This note describes the information about the ethnicity of the deceased that is collected by the death registration process in Scotland, and some of the limitations of the data.

Ethnicity information collected during death registration in Scotland

When a death is registered, information about the ethnicity of the deceased person is collected, on a voluntary basis, for use in research to improve health and healthcare services.

While the death registration process is statutory, and almost all questions asked of the informant to the death are mandatory, the provision of ethnicity information is undertaken on a voluntary basis. The registrar should ask whether the 'informant' (the relative or other person who registers the death) is willing to provide the Registrar General with information about the deceased person's ethnic group, and should describe briefly the purposes for which the information might be used. If the informant consents to providing the information, the registrar should ask them to pick the most appropriate ethnic group from a list of categories (these are currently consistent with those used in the 2011 Census). Otherwise, the registrar should record either 'not willing to provide' or 'ethnic group not known' (whichever is appropriate).

More information about how the information is collected is available from the [NRS website](#).

Coronavirus (COVID-19) deaths by ethnicity

NRS is focused on providing clear and comprehensive information on the impact of COVID-19 to help support and inform understanding of the impact and spread of the virus. In response to user feedback, NRS has considered the value of an analysis of deaths involving COVID-19 by ethnicity (using the information collected as part of the death registration process).

Table 1 provides a breakdown by ethnicity of the number of deaths involving COVID-19 that had been registered in Scotland up to Sunday 26 April 2020. There were a total of 2,272 such deaths, but, as the table shows, the deceased's ethnicity was not provided for 203 deaths (9% of the total).

Table 1 also shows that:

- 2,046 deaths (90%) were of people whose ethnic group was registered as White
- Registered deaths where a Black, Asian or minority ethnic group (BAME) was provided accounted for only 1% of deaths.

Given ethnicity is not known for 9% of registered deaths, the true number of COVID-19 deaths broken down by ethnic group categories cannot be accurately ascertained from the registration data. For example, the true proportion of COVID-19 deaths among the BAME groups could be anywhere between 1% and 10%.

The quality of death registration ethnicity has previously been assessed (using ethnicity recorded in the 2011 Census) and it was concluded that the data were not yet suitable for calculating reliable mortality rates for most ethnic groups. This report is available from the [NRS website](#).

Table 1: Deaths involving COVID-19 registered between weeks 1 and 17 (year to 26 April), 2020, by the ethnicity of the deceased, Scotland

Ethnicity	Number	%
All such deaths	2,272	100
Ethnicity not provided when the death was registered	203	8.9
White	2,046	90.1
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	2	0.1
Asian	20	0.9
African	0	0
Caribbean or Black	0	0
Other ethnic group	1	0.0

The most recent data on Deaths involving coronavirus (COVID-19) is published on the [NRS website](#).