

Vital Events – General Background Information – Births and Deaths: Days until Registration

Key Points

All the statistics of vital events (e.g. births, marriages and deaths) that National Records of Scotland (NRS) routinely publishes are based on the date on which the event was registered, rather than the date on which the event occurred. Inevitably, of course, there may be several days between the occurrence of an event and its registration.

In Scotland there is a legal requirement to register births within 21 days and deaths within 8 days. The overwhelming majority of births and deaths are registered within these timescales. Excluding a very small proportion of cases (for which the data may be unreliable – refer to the [Detailed Information about the Statistics](#) section of the website), for births registered in 2017 the mean interval between the dates of birth and registration was 12.2 days and the median interval was 11 days; for deaths the mean number of days until registration was 3.3 days and the median was 2 days. So, particularly for deaths, there will usually be little percentage difference between the routinely-published annual (and quarterly) statistics, which are based on the date of registration, and any figures that might be produced on the basis of the years (or quarters) in which the events occurred.

The number of days between a birth occurring and it being registered has fluctuated (but not changed greatly, overall) throughout the period since 1974 (the first year for which there are records of individual births and deaths in NRS' statistical database). For example:

- the overall average number of days until registration was:
 - 11.3 in 1974,
 - 11.7 in 1980,
 - 12.3 in 1990,
 - 11.6 in 2000,
 - 10.9 in 2010,
 - 12.2 in 2017;
- the median number of days between a birth and its registration was:
 - 11 in 1974,
 - 11 in 1980,
 - 12 in 1990,
 - 11 in 2000,
 - 10 in 2010,
 - 11 in 2017;
- in the first five of those six years, 95% of births were registered within 21 days (in 2017, 95% of births were registered within 23 days); and
- in each of those six years, 99% of births were registered within at most 32 days (within 28 days in one of those years, within 30 days in two years, within 31 days in one year; and within 32 days in two years).

The number of days between a death occurring and it being registered has been tending to increase since around the mid-1990s. For example:

- the overall average number of days until registration was:

- 1.4 in 1974,
- 1.5 in 1980,
- 1.5 in 1990,
- 2.0 in 2000,
- 2.6 in 2010,
- 3.3 in 2017;
- the median number of days between a death and its registration was:
 - 1 in 1974, 1980, 1990 and 2000,
 - 2 in 2010 and 2017;
- 95% of deaths were registered within:
 - 4 days, in each of 1974, 1980 and 1990,
 - 6 days in 2000,
 - 8 days in 2010,
 - 9 days in 2017; and
- 99% of deaths were registered within:
 - 6 or 7 days in each of 1974, 1980 and 1990,
 - 10 days in 2000;
 - 14 days in 2010;
 - 17 days in 2017.

These and other statistics for each year from 1974 are given in two tables which are available via the links below. In addition, two charts show how the cumulative percentages of births and deaths registered in a year increase with the number of days since the events occurred. The patterns shown are unlikely to change much from year to year, given that [Table 1](#) and [Table 2](#) show that, normally, there are at most only fairly gradual changes in the various statistics.

In Scotland, from 13 May 2015, for randomly-chosen deaths which have not been reported to the Procurator Fiscal, the Medical Certificate of the Cause of Death (MCCD) is reviewed by the [Death Certification Review Service](#) (DCRS). The registration of a death which is being reviewed by DCRS cannot be completed until the review is over, because the review could lead to a change in the description of the cause of death that is given in the MCCD. Therefore, the registration of some deaths will be delayed by the review process. The figures in Table 2 suggest that (overall) the effect has not been large, because:

- the average number of days until registration increased from 2.9 in 2014 (the last full year before DCRS started its work) through 3.2 in 2015 (the year in which DCRS started operating) to 3.3 in 2016 (the first full year for which DCRS reviewed deaths) and also 3.3 in 2017;
- the three lower percentiles, the quartiles, the median and the 90th percentile did not change over those four years, so the introduction of the review process did not appear to affect the time that was taken to register most deaths (which is not surprising, as DCRS reviews only a sample of MCCDs);
- the 95th percentile increased from 8 days in 2014 through 9 days in 2015 and 10 days in 2016 (but was 9 days in 2017); and the 99th percentile increased from 15 days in 2014 through 17 days in 2015 and 18 days in 2016 (but was 17 days in 2017). In both cases, the rises were more rapid than had been seen in the previous 5-10 years, suggesting that the introduction of the review process in 2015 did have an effect that was additional to that of the longer-term trend in those statistics.