

Vital Events – Deaths – Background Information

Deaths – ‘Years of Life lost’

Vital Events Reference Table 6.13 provides rough estimates of the ‘years of life lost’ for selected causes of death. It can be used to show how some causes may account for only a small percentage of deaths but are responsible for a larger proportion of the loss of years of life which might have been expected, had people not died at a relatively young age. The table provides rough estimates of the years of life lost on two bases.

- Years of working life lost - for this purpose, the ‘working’ life period is assumed to cover all ages between the ages of 15 and 64. The estimate uses the sum of the differences between the age of 65 and each person’s age at death. It is assumed that any death under the age of 15 contributes 50 years to the ‘working’ life lost total. Anyone who dies at the age of 65 or over contributes zero years to the total.
- Years of life to age 90 lost - the estimate uses the sum of the differences between the age of 90 and each person’s age at death, if it is under 90. Anyone who dies at the age of 90 or over contributes zero years to the total.

Another point which should be noted is that the numbers of deaths shown in the table relate only to people who died before their 90th birthdays. However, the population of all ages (including people aged 90 and over) is used as the denominator for the rates.

The methodology for calculating years of life lost was revised on publication of the 2013 reference tables to bring it into line with other sources. Previously, the mid-point of the relevant age group was used to calculate years of life lost but this has now been updated to use age at last birthday. The impact of this change is a relatively small downwards revision. For example, under the previous methodology the total years of life lost in 2013 would be 803,000 compared to 778,000 using the new methodology and the years of working life lost would have been 141,000 compared with 133,000.