

Deaths involving coronavirus (COVID-19) in Scotland

Week 21
(18 May to 24 May 2020)

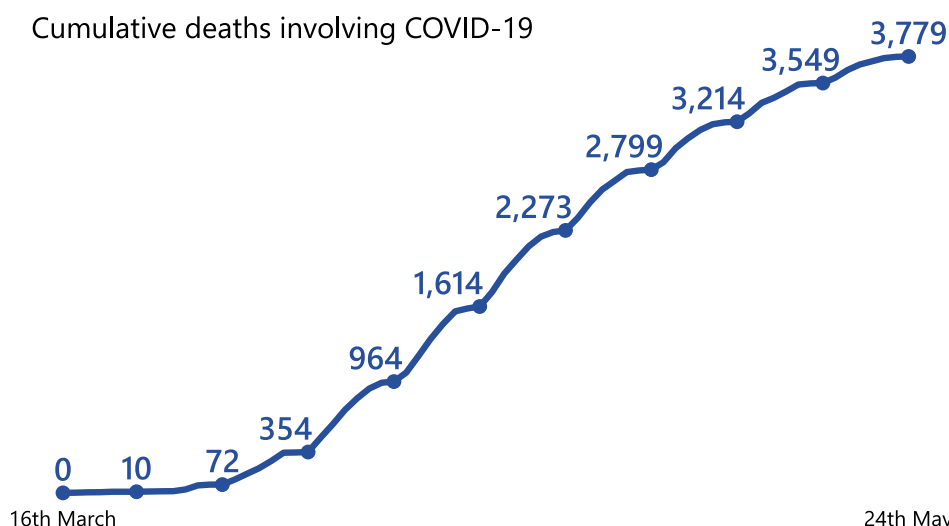
Published on 27 May 2020



This statistical report includes provisional statistics on the number of deaths associated with coronavirus (COVID-19) and the total number of deaths registered in Scotland, for weeks 1 to 21 of 2020

As of 24th May, 3,779 deaths had been registered which mentioned COVID-19

The first mention of COVID-19 in a death registration was in the week beginning 16th March 2020.



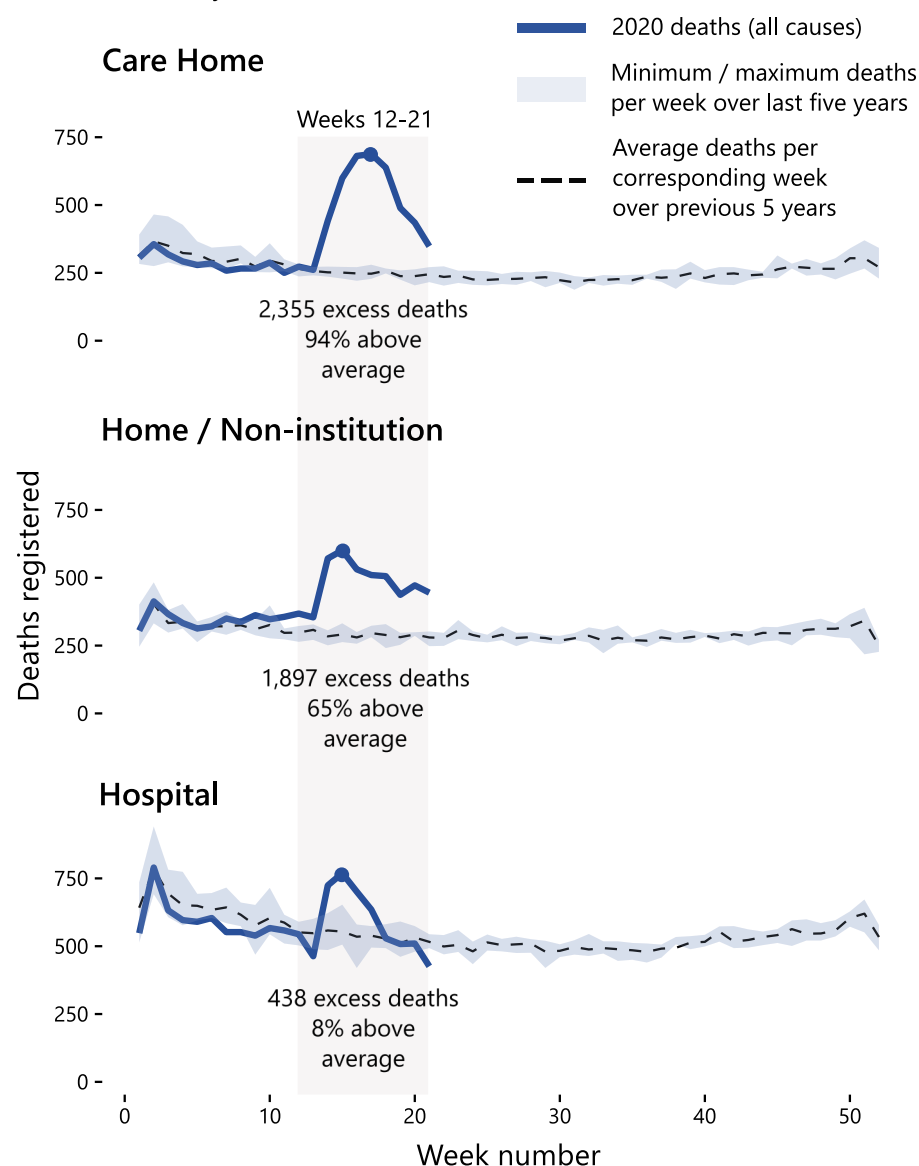
Most excess deaths have occurred in care homes

Between weeks 12 and 21 (16 March to 24 May) there were 2,355 (94%) more deaths in care homes than average. Excess deaths peaked in week 17 and have been falling ever since, but deaths are still higher than average for this time of year.

In the same period, there were 1,897 excess deaths which took place at home or in a non-institutional setting (65% above average).

Excess deaths in hospitals peaked in week 15 and have now fallen to below average levels. The total excess over weeks 12 to 21 is 8% above average.

Excess deaths by location



Key Findings

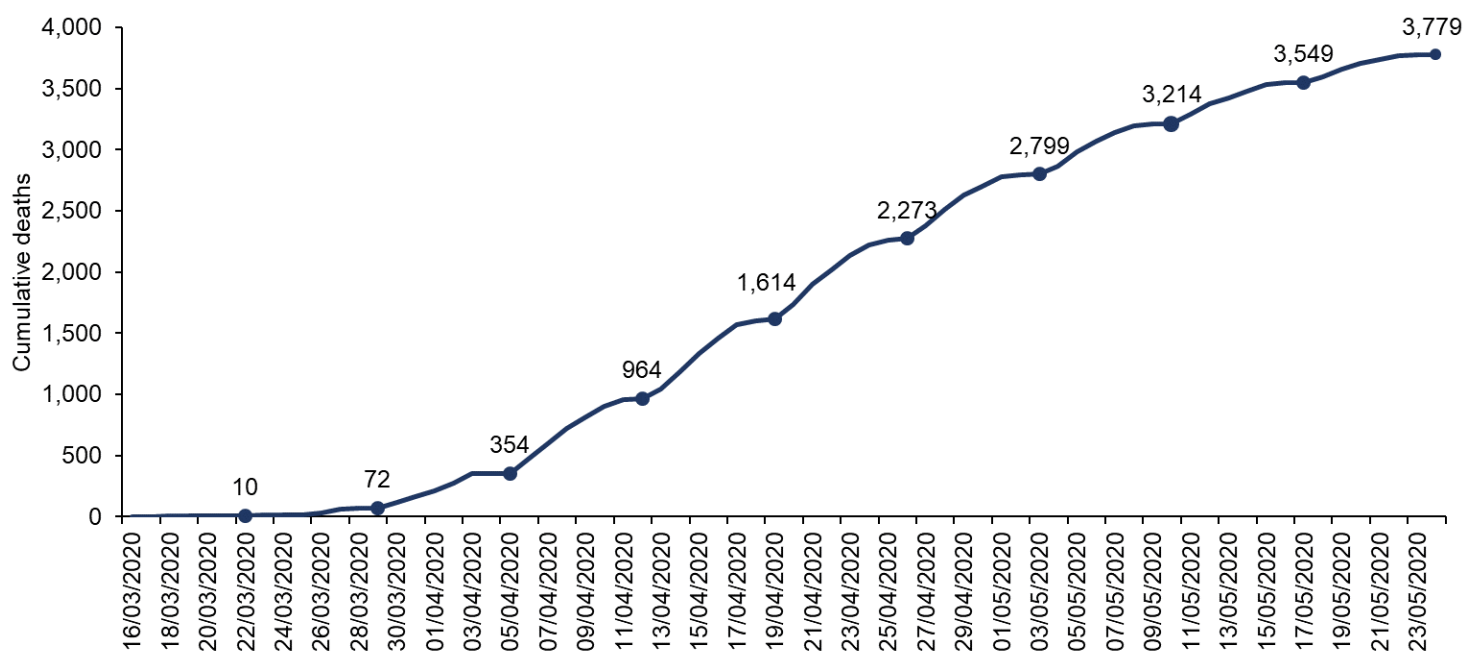
Deaths involving COVID-19

- As at 24 May, there have been a total of 3,779 deaths registered in Scotland where the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) was mentioned on the death certificate. The first mention of COVID-19 in a registered death certificate was the week beginning 16th March 2020.
- Of the total number of deaths registered in week 21 (18 to 24 May), there were 230 where COVID-19 was mentioned on the death certificate, a decrease of 105 from the previous week (11 to 17 May). This is the fourth weekly reduction in a row.
- Deaths involving COVID-19 as a proportion of all deaths has changed from:
 - 16% in week 14;
 - 31% in week 15;
 - 34% in week 16;
 - 36% in week 17;
 - 31% in week 18;
 - 29% in week 19;
 - 24% in week 20; to
 - 19% in week 21
- 46% of COVID-19 deaths registered to date related to deaths in care homes. 47% of deaths were in hospitals and 7% of deaths were at home or non-institutional settings.
- The proportion of COVID-19 deaths which took place in care homes has risen over time but has dropped back in recent weeks and now represents 54% of all COVID-19 deaths in week 21. The number of deaths in care homes fell for a fourth week, by 62 to 124.
- Three quarters (76%) of all deaths involving COVID-19 to date were of people aged 75 or over.
- This number is different from the count of deaths published daily on the [gov.scot website](https://gov.scot), because the latter is based on deaths of those who have tested positive for COVID-19. The NRS figures published here include all deaths where COVID-19 (included suspected cases) was mentioned on the death certificate.

All Deaths

- The provisional total number of deaths registered in Scotland in week 21 of 2020 (18 to 24 May) was 1,223. This is a decrease of 198 from the number registered in the previous week.
- The average number of deaths registered in the corresponding week over the previous five years was 1,045. There were 17% more deaths (178) registered in week 21 of 2020 (18 May to 24 May) compared to the average.
- There were fewer deaths from respiratory diseases (-39), circulatory conditions (-31) and dementia and Alzheimer's (-11) compared to the average for this time of year. As a result, the number of deaths where COVID-19 was the underlying cause (212) was greater than the total number of excess deaths.

Figure 1: Cumulative number of deaths involving COVID-19 by date of registration, Scotland, 2020



Why are the NRS number of deaths different from the Scottish Government daily updates?

Put simply - they are two different measures that each have a valuable role in helping to monitor the number of deaths in Scotland involving COVID-19.

Scottish Government daily updates

These are provided by Health Protection Scotland (HPS) and count:

- all people who have had a positive test for COVID-19 and died within 28 days.

These are important because they are available earlier, and give a quicker indication of what is happening day by day and are broadly comparable with the figures released daily for the UK by the Department for Health and Social Care.

NRS weekly death totals

The figures in this publication count:

- all deaths where COVID-19 was mentioned on the death certificate by the doctor who certified the death. This includes cases where the doctor noted that there was suspected or probable coronavirus infection involved in the death.

As a result these weekly totals are likely to be higher than the daily figures - because the daily updates only include those who tested positive for the virus.

Using the complete death certificate allows NRS to analyse a lot of information, such as location of death and what other health conditions contributed to the death. We will start publishing more detailed breakdowns of the figures as soon as possible.

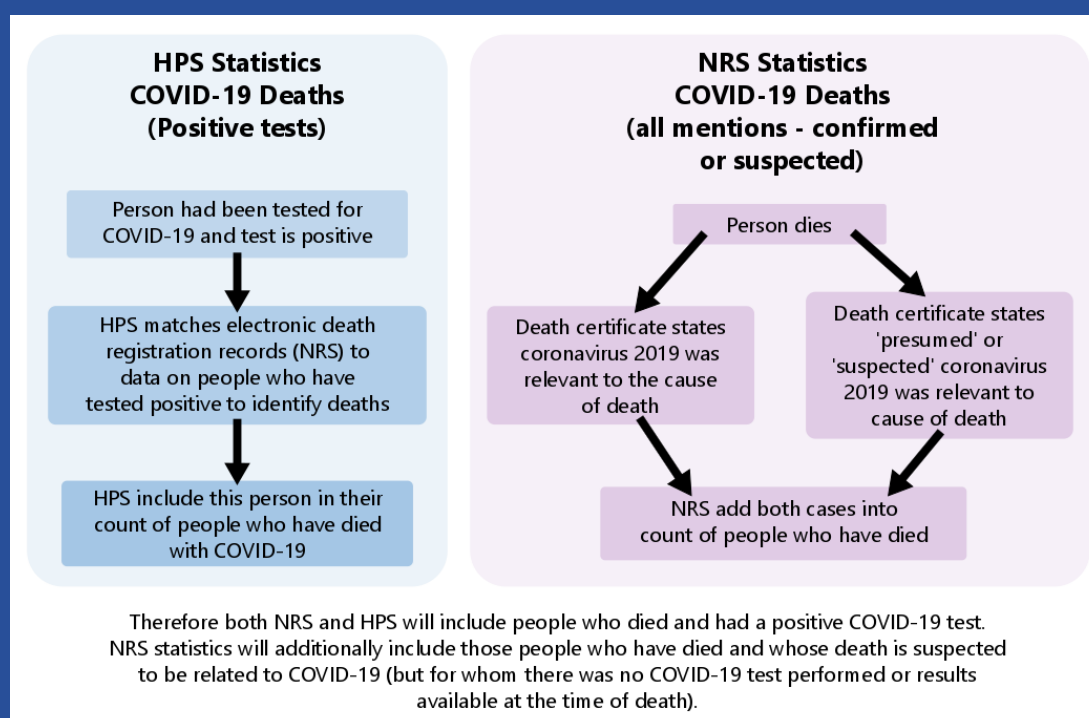
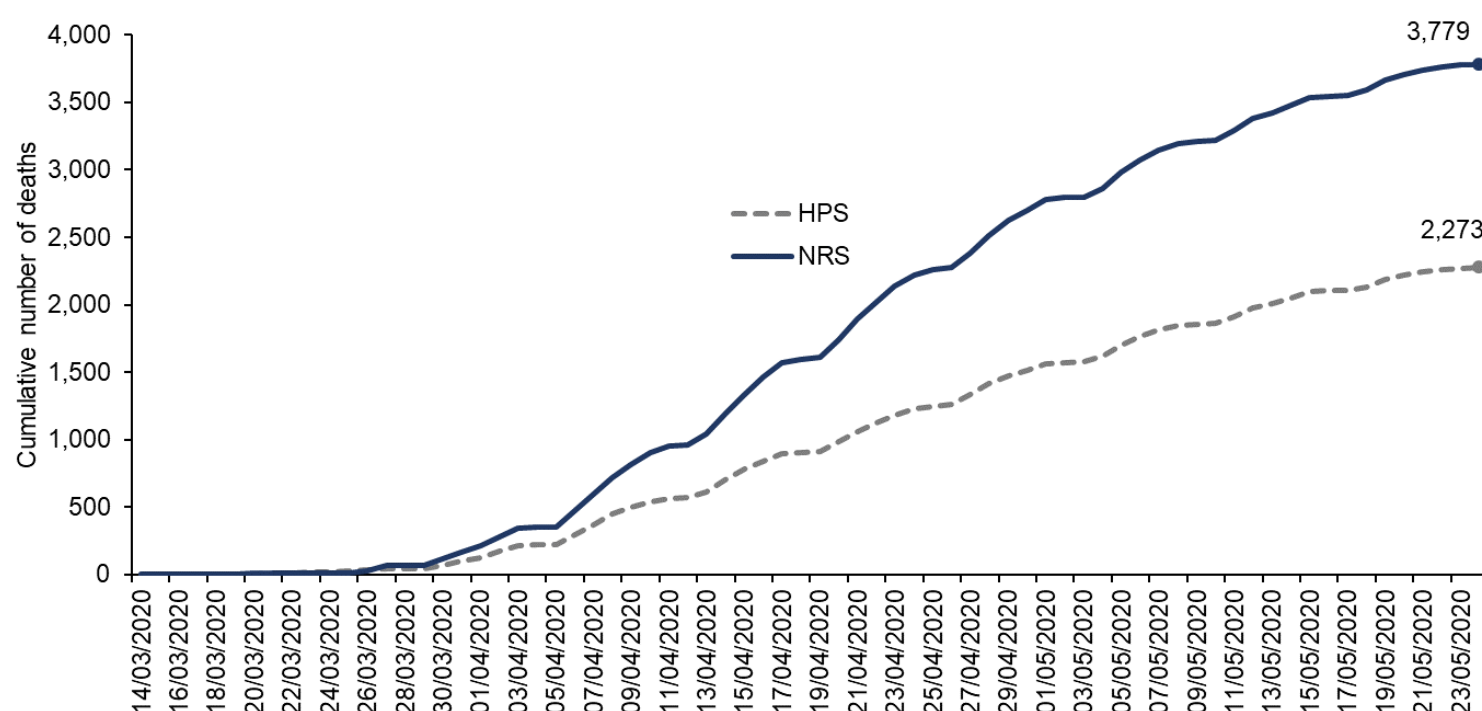


Figure 2 illustrates the differences between the two sets of figures. In the early stages, the figures were closely aligned but over time they have diverged with the NRS figure higher than the HPS figure. This is due to the inclusion of probable and suspected COVID deaths whereas the HPS figure only includes deaths of those who had tested positive for the virus.

It should be noted that the apparent flattening of these curves over weekends are caused by a limited number of death registrations taking place at weekends and are not an indication that the curve has reached a plateau. Figures for weekends will be artificially low and the numbers are likely to rise more steeply at the beginning of the week as registrars catch up with the backlog of death registrations.

Figure 2: Cumulative number of deaths involving COVID-19 in Scotland using different data sources 2020



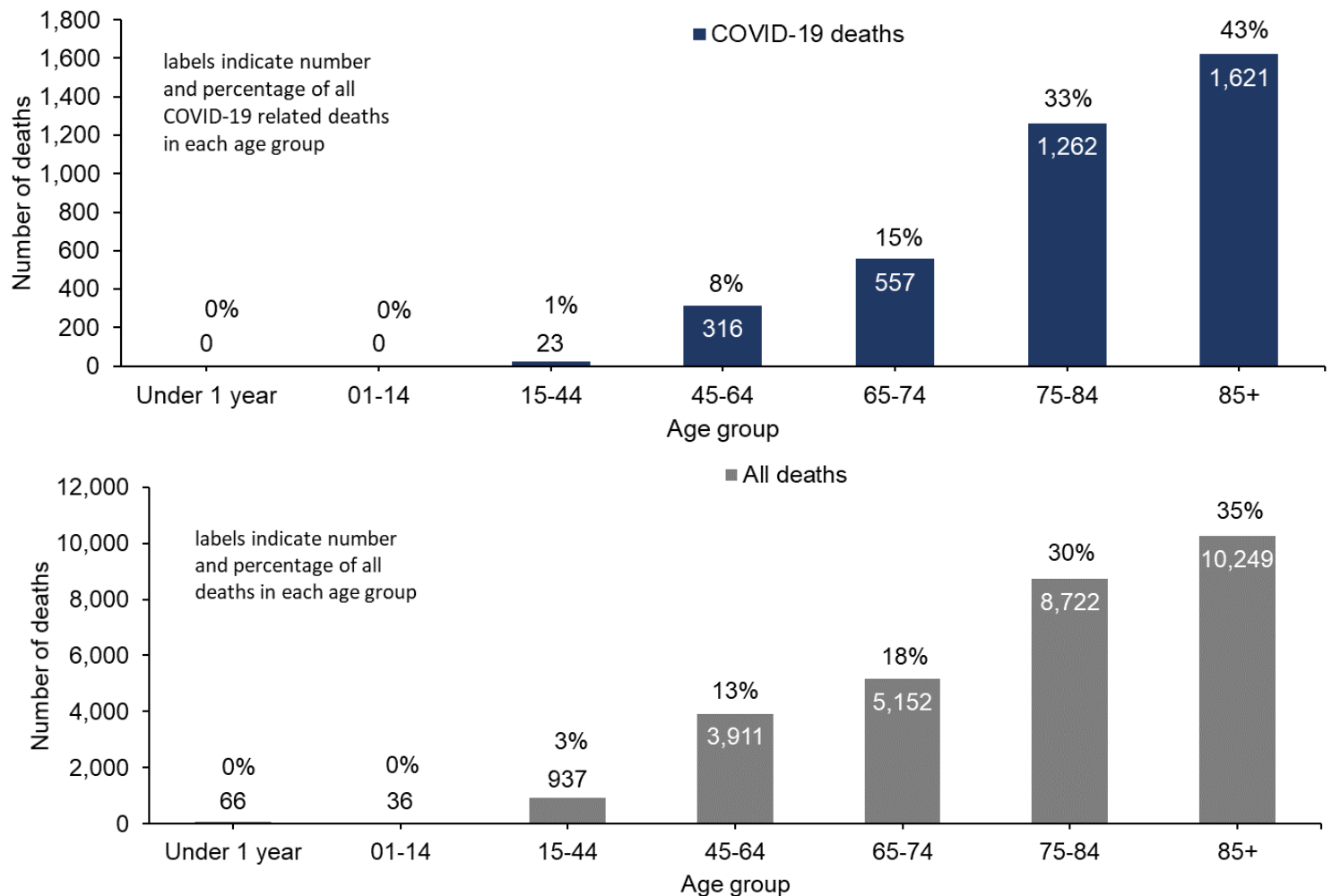
How are different age groups being impacted?

- Three quarters (76%) of all deaths involving COVID-19 to date were of people aged 75 or over.
- The greatest proportion of COVID-19 deaths are in people aged 85+ with 43% of all COVID-19 deaths. This compares with 35% of deaths from all causes in this age category.

What are the number of deaths broken down by sex?

- Of all deaths to date involving COVID-19, 50% were male (1,898) and 50% were female (1,881).
- Age-standardised death rates (adjusting for the age-structure of the population) were almost 50% higher for men than for women (716 vs 479 per 100,000 population for deaths occurring in April). (Detailed figures in week 19 report)

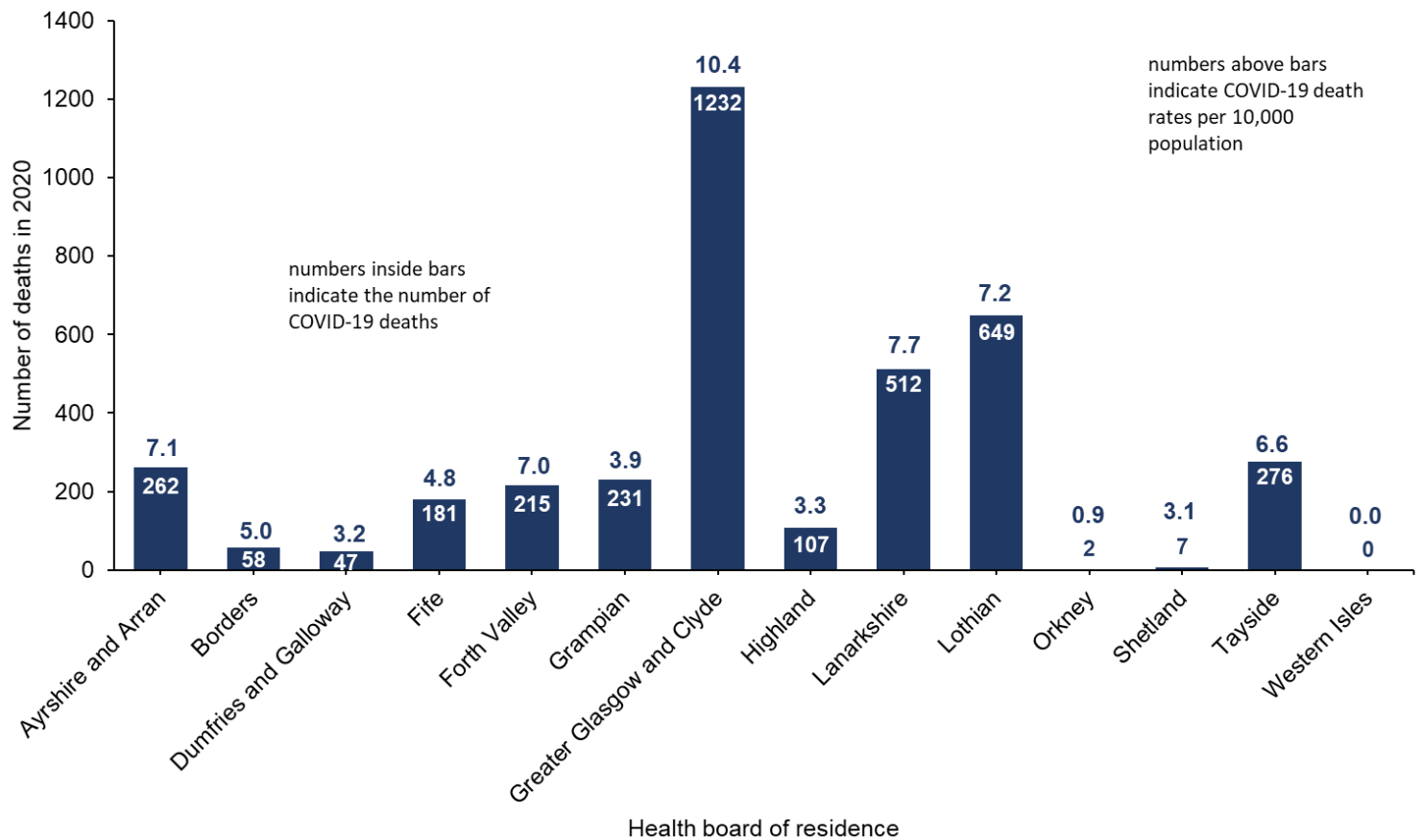
Figure 3: COVID-19 deaths and all deaths registered between weeks 1 and 21 (year to 24th May), 2020 by age group, Scotland



How do the number of deaths differ across Scotland?

- In week 21 (18 to 24 May), the Health Board area with the highest number of deaths involving COVID-19 was Greater Glasgow and Clyde with 75 deaths (also the highest number of COVID-19 deaths to date with 1,232).
- The Health Board area with the highest rate of COVID-19 deaths to date was also Greater Glasgow and Clyde with 10.4 deaths per 10,000 population.
- Figures for council areas are available in the accompanying [spreadsheet](#).

Figure 4: Deaths involving COVID-19 registered between weeks 1 and 21 (year to 24 May), 2020 by Health Board of residence, Scotland¹



¹ Rates per 10,000 population are based on population in mid-2019 as these are the most recent population estimates at the time of publication.

How do these weekly death figures compare with those produced by ONS (for England and Wales)?

The figures are produced using same definition as those published by the ONS for England and Wales, so are broadly comparable.

One minor difference is how the registration weeks are defined:

- Weeks used by ONS (for England and Wales) run from Saturday to Friday
- NRS weeks (for Scotland) run from Monday to Sunday (this is the [ISO8601](#) standard week).

In practice, this is likely to have very little impact on comparisons as there are few registrations that take place on Saturdays and Sundays.

You can view the latest weekly figures from ONS for England and Wales [here](#) and their latest monthly analysis [here](#). The latest figures from NISRA for Northern Ireland are available [here](#). The figures for the rest of the UK are a week behind those for Scotland so the equivalent weeks should be compared.

Figure 5: Deaths by week of registration, Scotland, 2020

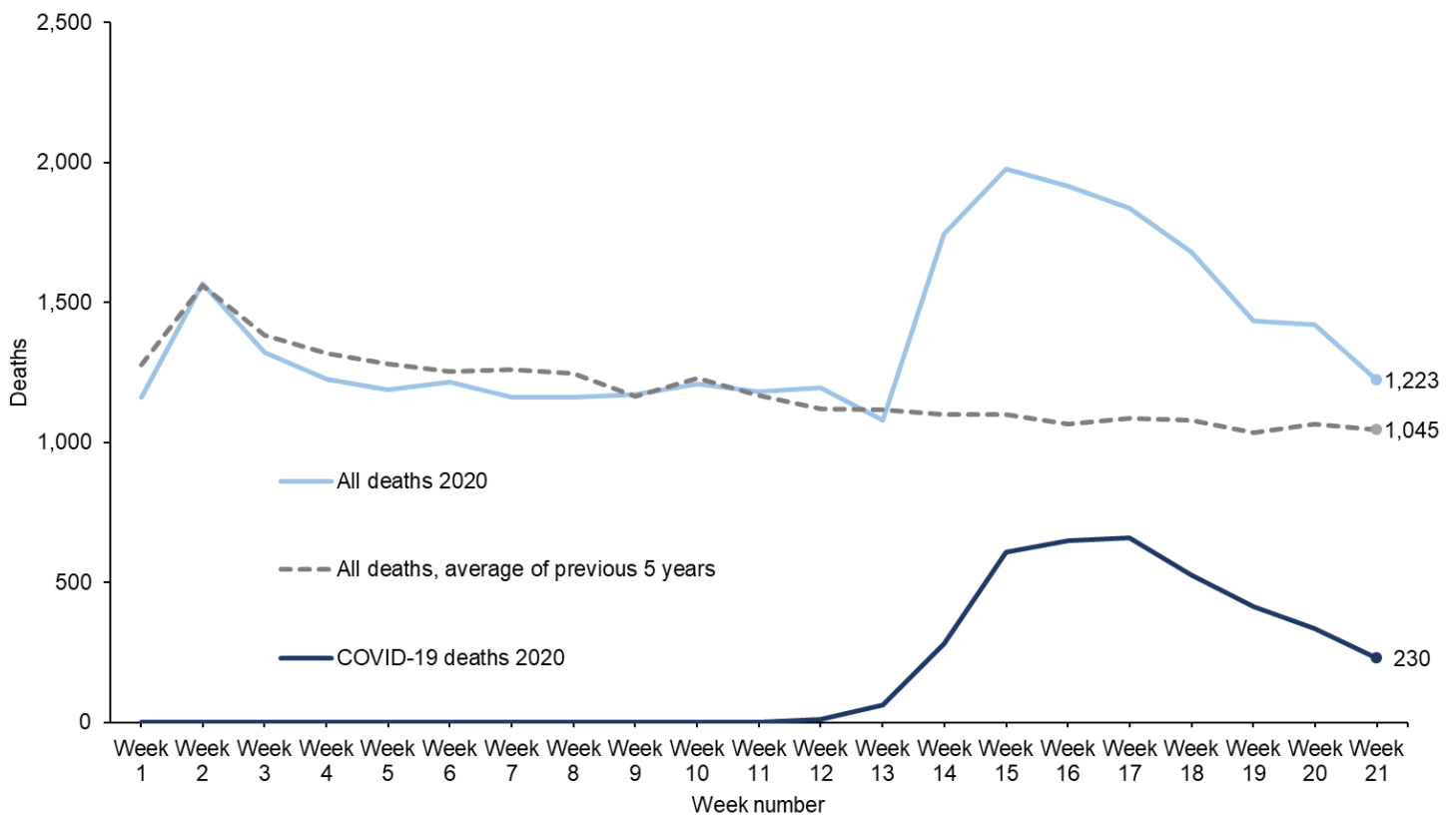


Figure 5 shows that in 2020 up to week 13, the number of weekly registered deaths in Scotland had been broadly in line with the five year average. From week 14 onwards there has been a clear divergence from the five year average. After peaking in week 15, the number of excess deaths has reduced. For the most recent week (ending 24 May) there were 178 (17%) more deaths registered compared to the average for this time of year.

Deaths involving COVID-19 as a percentage of all deaths rose from 16% in week 14 to 36% in week 17 but has fallen to 19% in week 21.

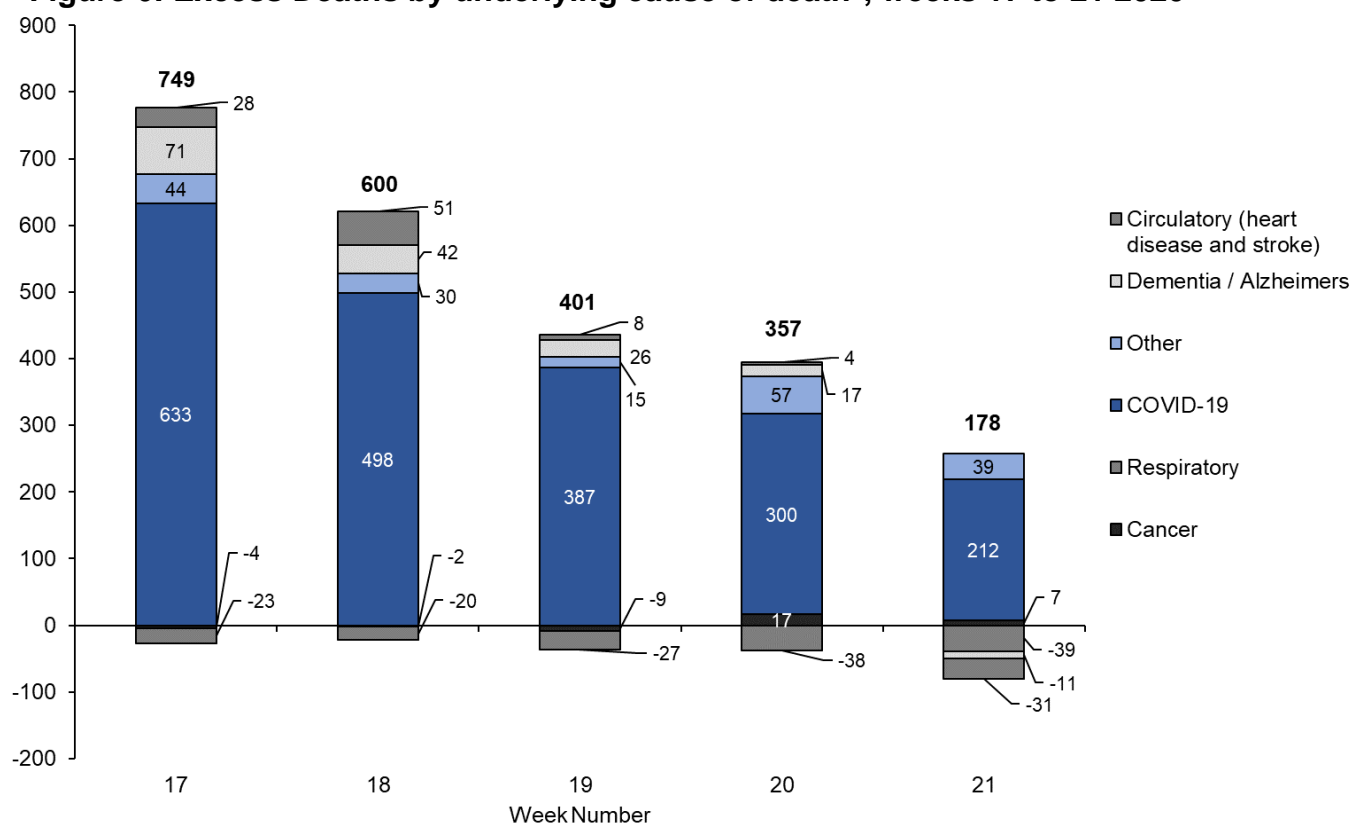
What are “Excess Deaths”?

The total number of deaths registered in a week in 2020 minus the average number of deaths registered in the same week over the period 2015 to 2019.

Figure 6 shows the number of excess deaths in the latest five weeks broken down by the underlying cause of death. There were 178 more deaths registered in week 21 of 2020 (18 to 24 May) compared to the average for this time of year.

There were fewer deaths from respiratory diseases (-39), circulatory conditions (-31) and dementia and Alzheimer’s (-11) compared to the average for this time of year. As a result, the number of deaths where COVID-19 was the underlying cause (212) was greater than the total number of excess deaths.

Figure 6: Excess Deaths by underlying cause of death*, weeks 17 to 21 2020



* ICD-10 codes for cause of death categories are as follows:

Cancer – C00-C97

Dementia and Alzheimer’s – F01, F03, G30

Circulatory – I00-I99

Respiratory – J00-J99

COVID-19 – U07

Other – all other codes not mentioned above

What do we mean by “Underlying Cause of Death”?

The figures in this publication focus on deaths where COVID-19 was mentioned on the death certificate (either as the underlying cause or as a contributory factor).

In order to present a comparison of different causes of death, it is better to focus on deaths by underlying cause. This is because several causes can be listed on an individual death certificate so if we include all mentions of each particular cause we would end up with some double counting within our analysis.

The analysis of excess mortality in figure 6 is based on deaths where COVID-19 was the underlying cause of death. Therefore the number of deaths in week 21 (212) are slightly lower than the number given for COVID-19 deaths elsewhere in this publication (230) as they are deaths involving COVID (either as the underlying cause or as a contributory factor).

Of all deaths involving COVID-19 registered by 24 May, it was the underlying cause in 95% of cases (3,574 out of 3,779).

More information on how the underlying cause of death is determined is available on the [NRS website](#).

Where have COVID-19 deaths taken place?

Of the 3,779 deaths involving COVID-19 which were registered to date, 46% related to deaths in care homes. 47% of deaths were in hospitals and 7% of deaths were at home or non-institutional settings.

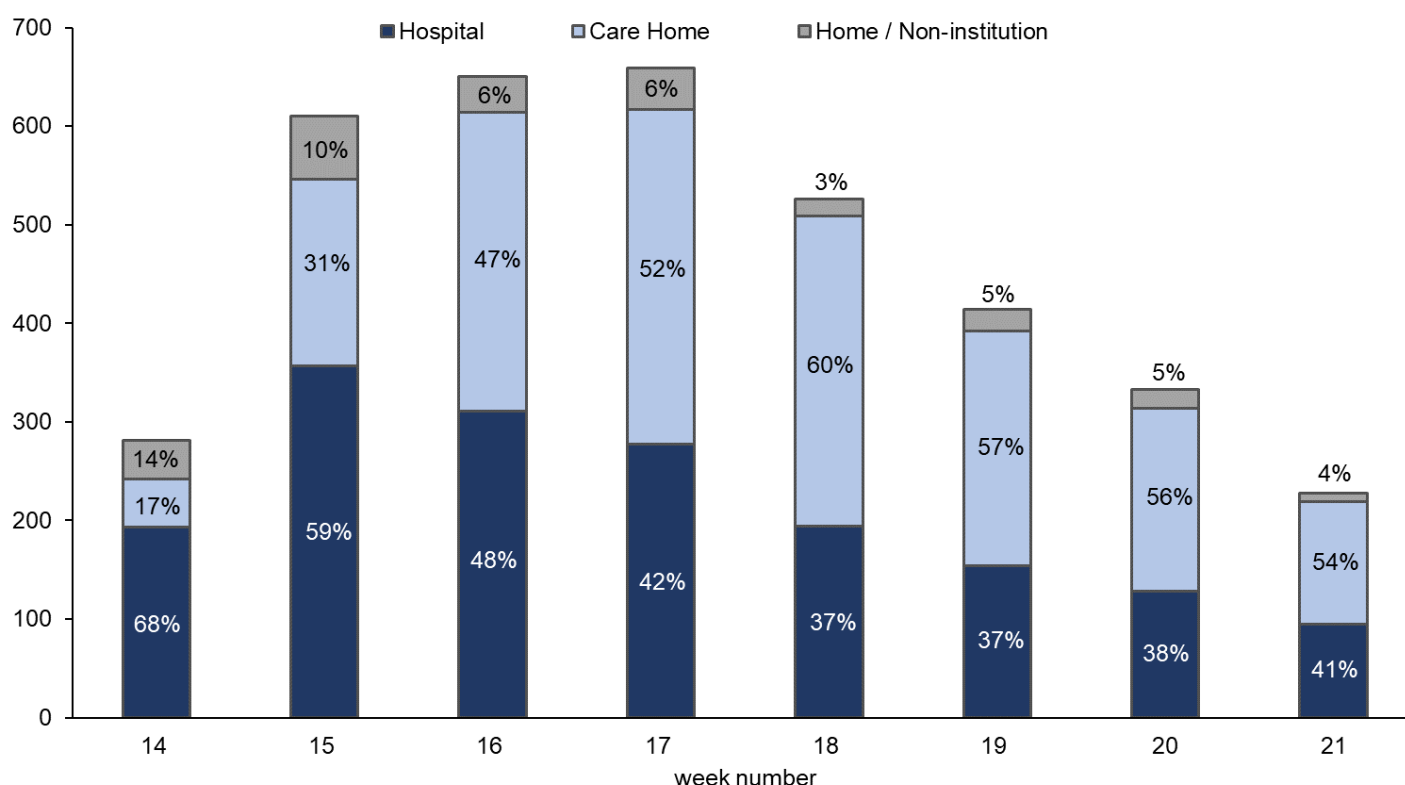
To put these figures into context, in 2018 (the latest year for which final figures are available) around 24% of all deaths occurred in care homes, 49% in hospitals and 27% in home or non-institutional settings.

Figure 7 shows the numbers and proportion of deaths involving COVID-19 by location for weeks 14 to 21 in 2020.

In earlier weeks most COVID deaths were occurring in hospitals. The proportion of deaths in care homes has increased over time although has dropped back slightly in recent weeks and now represents 54% of COVID deaths in week 21. The number of deaths in care homes fell for a fourth week, by 62 to 124.

Breakdowns of location of death within health board and council area are available in the accompanying [spreadsheet](#).

Figure 7: Deaths involving COVID-19 by location of death, weeks 14 to 21, 2020

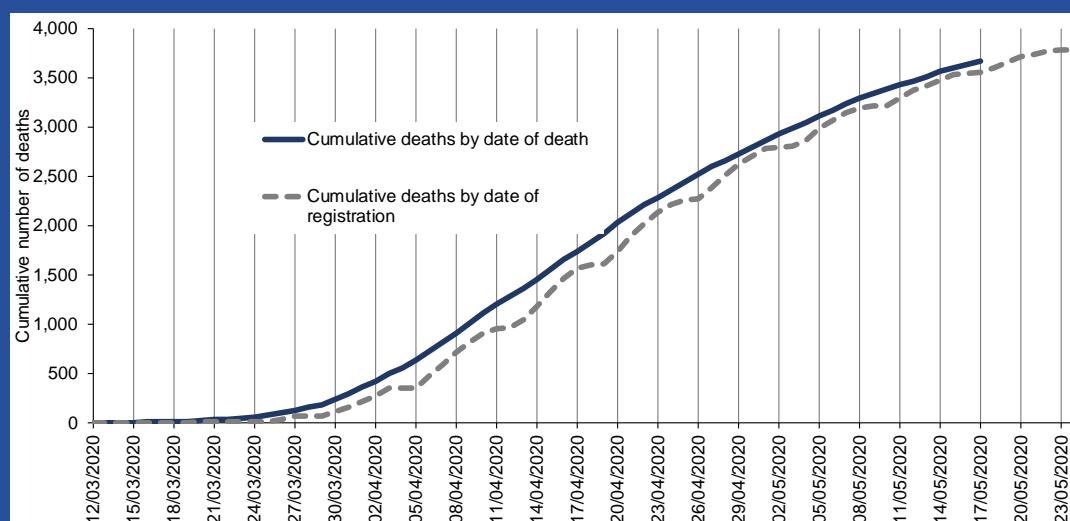


Why focus on date of registration rather than the actual date of death?

The figures throughout this report are based on the date a death was registered rather than the date the death occurred. When someone dies, their family (or a representative) have to make an appointment with a registrar to register the death. Legally this must be done within 8 days, although in practice there is, on average, a 3 day gap between a death occurring and being registered.

This therefore means that the latest trend in COVID-19 deaths by date of registration (the NRS headline measure) has a lag of around 3 days when compared with the figures on date of death. Figure 8 below illustrates this – of the 3,549 deaths which were registered by 17 May, all had all occurred by 14 May.

Figure 8: Deaths involving COVID-19, Date of Death vs Date of Registration 2020



This publication includes all deaths which were registered by 24 May. There will, however, be deaths which occurred before 24 May but were not yet registered. In order to include a more complete analysis based on date of death, we need to wait an additional week to allow the registration process to fully complete. The trend based on date of death therefore only includes deaths which occurred by 17 May as the vast majority of these have now been registered – so although this gives a more accurate picture, it takes more time to compile. However, they are valuable statistics and provide a clearer understanding of the impact and progress of COVID-19, when used alongside the other available daily and operational data.

In Summary

The death count based on **date of registration** is **more timely** but is incomplete.

The death count based on **date of death** is **more complete** and gives a more accurate trend on the progress of the virus, but less timely (a one week delay compared to date of registration figures).

Things you should know about how these statistics are compiled

Figures are based on the date of registration. In Scotland deaths must be registered within 8 days but in practice, the average time between death and registration is around 3 days.

Figures are allocated to weeks based on the ISO8601 standard. Weeks begin on a Monday and end on a Sunday. Often weeks at the beginning and end of a year will overlap the preceding and following years (e.g. week 1 of 2020 began on Monday 30 December 2019) so the weekly figures may not sum to any annual totals which are subsequently produced.

Deaths involving COVID-19 are defined as those where COVID-19 is mentioned on the death certificate, either as the underlying cause of death or as a contributory cause. Cause of death is coded according to the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Conditions 10 Revision (ICD-10). The relevant codes included in this publication are U07.1 and U07.2.

Figures include deaths where 'suspected' or 'probable' COVID-19 appears on the death certificate.

Data are provisional and subject to change in future weekly publications. The data will be finalised in June 2021. Reasons why the data might be revised later include late registration data being received once the week's figure have been produced or more information being provided by a certifying doctor or The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) on the cause of death.

We recently published a note on our [website](#) which explains why we cannot currently analyse COVID-19 deaths data on the basis of ethnic group.

Certain user enquiries for ad-hoc analysis related to COVID-19 deaths have been published on our [website](#).

Breakdown	Frequency	When Added	Latest Period Covered	Date Last Published
Age group	Weekly	8 April 2020	Week 21	27 May 2020
Sex	Weekly	8 April 2020	Week 21	27 May 2020
Location	Weekly	15 April 2020	Week 21	27 May 2020
Health Board	Weekly	8 April 2020	Week 21	27 May 2020
Local Authority	Weekly	22 April 2020	Week 21	27 May 2020
Excess deaths by cause	Weekly	22 April 2020	Week 21	27 May 2020
Age-standardised mortality rates	Monthly	13 May 2020	April	13 May 2020
Leading causes of death	Monthly	13 May 2020	April	13 May 2020
Pre-existing conditions	Monthly	13 May 2020	April	13 May 2020
Deprivation	Monthly	13 May 2020	March/April combined	13 May 2020
Urban Rural	Monthly	13 May 2020	March/April combined	13 May 2020
Daily occurrences by location of death	Monthly	13 May 2020	March and April	13 May 2020

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Recording the present – At our network of local offices, we register births, marriages, civil partnerships, deaths, divorces and adoptions in Scotland.

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You can get other detailed statistics that we have produced from the Statistics section of our website. Scottish Census statistics are available on the Scotland's Census website.

We also provide information about future publications on our website. If you would like us to tell you about future statistical publications, you can register your interest on the Scottish Government ScotStat website.

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Enquiries and suggestions

Please get in touch if you need any further information, or have any suggestions for improvement.

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