

Statistical bulletin

# Quarterly suicide death registrations in England: 2001 to 2017 registrations and 2018 provisional data

Provisional rate and number of suicide deaths registered in England per quarter. Includes 2001 to 2017 registrations and provisional data for 2018.

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Release date:  
30 April 2019

Next release:  
To be announced

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# 1 . Main points

- Provisional data show that there were 10.6 suicide deaths per 100,000 people in Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2018 in England, equivalent to 1,316 deaths.
- For females, there were 5.5 suicide deaths per 100,000 females in Quarter 4 2018, equivalent to 344 deaths; while among males, there were 16.0 deaths per 100,000 males during the same period, equivalent to 972 deaths.
- The rates for all people and females in Quarter 4 2018 were statistically higher than those in Quarter 4 2017; despite this, the latest rates are similar to several other rates observed in the same quarter since our time series began in 2001.
- The latest male rate is consistent with those observed in the previous Quarter 4 and since our time series began.

## 2 . Things you need to know about this release

The purpose of this statistical release is to provide timely surveillance of suicide death registrations in England, based on the best available provisional data.

Quarterly data for 2018 are provisional and may be subject to changes once annual death registrations are complete. For example, some deaths may be registered but the underlying cause of death has not yet been coded. 2018 data will be finalised in the annual Suicides in the UK publication later in 2019.

Quarterly age-standardised rates are included to aid interpretation, such as whether changes by quarter in a given registration year are statistically meaningful. This is especially important when interpreting low numbers of deaths, which are prone to random fluctuation and volatility over time.

Numbers of suicides by quarter are often small, particularly where males and females are analysed separately, as demonstrated by the relatively wide confidence intervals. For this reason, any comparisons should be interpreted with caution and particular attention paid to overlapping confidence intervals where differences are then not statistically significant.

Since the beginning of our time series in 2001, the number of suicide registrations in Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) tend to be lower than those observed in any of the other quarters, something that should be kept in mind when making comparisons. Further guidance on how to interpret the data included in this release is available in the "Table Interpretation" tab of the accompanying dataset.

### Changes in coronial-related practice

In England and Wales, when someone dies unexpectedly, a coroner investigates the circumstances to establish the cause of death. In July 2018, the Standard of Proof used by coroners to determine whether a death was caused by suicide changed. Previously, a "criminal standard" was applied, meaning that the coroner required evidence "beyond all reasonable doubt" that a death was caused by suicide. Since July 2018, a "civil standard" has been applied by coroners meaning that it must be shown on the balance of probability that:

- the death occurred because of a deliberate act by the deceased
- that in doing so and at all relevant times, the deceased intended the consequence would be death

For all deaths given a conclusion of suicide, a coroner makes this decision having ruled out all other possible explanations. The Office for National Statistics will monitor and report the impact of this change on our data; as the change in the Standard of Proof occurred partway through a calendar year, we will not know the impact of the change until we have more data.

## Information for the media

If you are a journalist covering a suicide-related issue, please consider following the [Samaritans' media guidelines on the reporting of suicide](#), due to the potentially damaging consequences of irresponsible reporting. In particular, the guidelines advise on terminology and include links to sources of support for anyone affected by the themes in the article, such as [Samaritans](#).

## Where to go for help

If you are struggling to cope, please call Samaritans free on 116 123 (UK and Ireland), email [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org), or [visit the Samaritans website](#) to find details of the nearest branch. Samaritans is available round the clock, every single day of the year, providing a safe place for anyone struggling to cope, whoever they are, however they feel, whatever life has done to them.

Resources are also available online. "[U can Cope](#)" includes a film and resources that are designed for people in distress and those trying to support them, to instil hope, promote appropriate self-help and inform people regarding useful strategies and how they can access help and support. "[Staying safe if you're not sure life's worth living](#)" includes practical, compassionate advice and many useful links for people in distress.

# 3 . Quality and methodology

## Suicide data

This release is based on the National Statistics definition of suicide; this includes all deaths from intentional self-harm for persons aged 10 years and over, and deaths where the intent was undetermined for those aged 15 years and over. For further information on the definition used, please see our [annual release](#).

Figures are for deaths registered, rather than deaths occurring, in each quarter. In England, deaths caused by suicide are investigated by coroners; the investigation, known as an "inquest" can take months and sometimes years. The amount of time it takes to complete an inquest creates what is known as a registration delay, in other words a lag between the date of death and the date of death registration. As such, publishing suicide figures based on death registration year means that many deaths appear in the statistics of a year that is later than the year in which the death occurred.

Despite registration delays, publication of suicide statistics by registration year enables figures to be published in a timely manner. The alternative would be to publish statistics based on the year in which the death occurred, however, this would delay publication, cause repeated revisions to historical data, and be inconsistent with other published mortality figures. Additionally, data provided in our annual release ([Table 20](#)) shows that, when you compare rates based on registration year and rates based on the date of death, these follow the same pattern of peaks and troughs over time.

Further information on the death certification process and registration delays can be found in the [User guide to mortality statistics](#).

## Quarterly age-standardised rates

Age-standardised mortality rates are calculated using the number of deaths and mid-year population estimates provided by our Population Estimates Unit. [Mid-year population estimates](#) were used for 2001 to 2017 rate calculations, while [2016-based ONS population projections](#) were used for 2018 age-standardised rates. For more information on age-standardisation, please see the [Quality and Methodology Information report](#).

Calculation of mortality rates for quarterly deaths requires adjustments to be made to annual population estimates, to calculate rates that are comparable with annual rates.

We calculate an annual population centred on the mid-point of the quarter using two years' worth of population estimates or projections. This is then multiplied by the proportion of the number of days within a quarter of the total number of days within that year. The output is used as the population denominator in calculations of age-standardised and age-specific mortality rates. This is calculated as follows:

*Quarter 4 (2018) population*

$$= \left( population_{2018}(i) + \left( (population_{2019}(i) - population_{2018}(i)) * \left( \frac{m}{M} \right) \right) \right) * \left( \frac{N}{M} \right)$$

Where:

- m is the number of days from 1 July 2017 (the start of the mid-year for the population estimate) to the midpoint of the relevant quarter, inclusive
- N is the number of days in the Quarter, for example, Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2018
- M is the number of days in 2018
- (i) is the age group

The [Suicides in the UK Quality and Methodology Information report](#) contains important information on:

- the strengths and limitations of the data and how it compares with related data
- uses and users of the data
- how the output was created
- the quality of the output including the accuracy of the data