Statistical bulletin

Quarterly suicide death registrations in England: 2001 to 2018 registrations and Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) to Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2019 provisional data

Provisional rate and number of suicide deaths registered in England per quarter. Includes 2001 to 2018 registrations and provisional data for Quarters 1, 2 and 3 (Jan to Mar, April to June and July to Sept) 2019.

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Next release:
To be announced

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1 . Main points

- Provisional data show there were 10.7 suicide deaths per 100,000 people in Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2019 in England, equivalent to 1,324 deaths registered.

- In Quarter 3 2019, there were 16.7 deaths per 100,000 males (1,010 deaths registered) and 5.0 suicide deaths per 100,000 females (314 deaths registered).

- Rates observed in Quarter 3 2019 for men and women are generally consistent with those observed in Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) and Quarter 2 (Apr to June) 2019 and Quarter 3 (July to Sept) of previous years.

2 . Things you need to know about this release

Change in the standard of proof used by coroners in England and Wales

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 was lowered to the " civil standard" – balance of probabilities – where previously a "criminal standard" was applied – beyond all reasonable doubt.

It is likely that lowering the standard of proof will result in an increased number of deaths recorded as suicide, possibly creating a discontinuity in our time series.

Whenever a change in suicide rates occurs, the reasons are complex and will rarely be because of one factor alone. However, it is likely that the change in the standard of proof may be contributing to the increased number of deaths recorded as suicide since July 2018. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) will monitor and report the impact of this change when more evidence is available.

Further information on the change in the standard of proof can be found in our Quality and Methodology Information (QMI) report and is explained in New standard of proof for suicide at inquests in England and Wales.

Purpose of this statistical release

This release aims to monitor suicide death registrations in England, based on the best available provisional data.

Quarterly data for 2019 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. Data for 2019 will be finalised in the annual Suicides in the UK publication in 2020.

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 should be 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.

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, owing 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, 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.

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. For deaths caused by suicide, this generally means that around half of the deaths registered in a given year will have occurred in the previous year, or earlier.

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 21) 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.

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 Quarter 2 (Apr to June) 2001 to 2018 rate calculations, while the latest 2018-based Office for National Statistics (ONS) population projections were used for the Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2018 to 2019 age-standardised rates. Recent quarterly rates of suicide by region use [2016-based ONS population projections [5] as updated subnational projections] are not yet available.

For more information on age-standardisation, please see the [Quality and Methodology Information (QMI) report](#).

Calculation of mortality rates for quarterly deaths requires adjustments to be made to annual population estimates in order 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 morality rates.

Quarter 3 2019 population:

$$= \left(population2018(i) \, + \, \left((population2019(i) \, - \, population2018(i)) \, \times \, \left(\frac{m}{M} \right) \right) \right) \times \left(\frac{N}{M} \right)$$

Where:

- m is the number of days from 1 July 2018 (the start of the mid-year for the population estimate) to the mid-point of the relevant quarter, inclusive

- N is the number of days in the quarter, for example, Quarter 3 2019

- M is the number of days in 2019

- (i) is the age group