

Article

# Impact of registration delays on mortality statistics in England and Wales: 2022

Analysis of the time taken to register deaths, by cause of death, area of usual residence, age, sex, and certification type.

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# 1 . Main points

- The median time between a death occurring and being registered (registration delay) in England and Wales was seven days for deaths registered in 2022, two days more than in 2021.
- The median delay in days for deaths certified by a coroner has increased each year since 2012, from 8 days in 2012, to 26 days in 2022.
- Wales had a lower median registration delay in 2022 (six days), compared with England (seven days).
- Registration delays increased in all English regions except Yorkshire and the Humber in 2022, with the highest median delay in the South East (nine days) and lowest in the North East (five days).

## 2 . Registration delays in England and Wales

In 2022, there were 577,160 deaths registered in England and Wales. Of these, 577,158 had a valid date of death occurrence, as well as registration. This article analyses deaths where a registration delay can be determined. This figure (577,158) is used as the denominator for delay proportions in this article. For further information, see [Section 5: Data sources and quality](#).

### Figure 1: In 2022, 93.9% of registered deaths occurred in the same year

Number of registered deaths by year of registration and occurrence, England and Wales, 2001 to 2022

#### Notes:

1. Figures include deaths of non-residents.
2. Registrations that do not provide enough information to calculate the delay are excluded.

**Download the data**

Of the 577,158 deaths registered in England and Wales, 93.9% were registered in the same year as they occurred. The number of deaths registered more than a year after they occurred increased from 6,083 (1.0% of all registrations) in 2021 to 6,481 (1.1% of all registrations) in 2022.

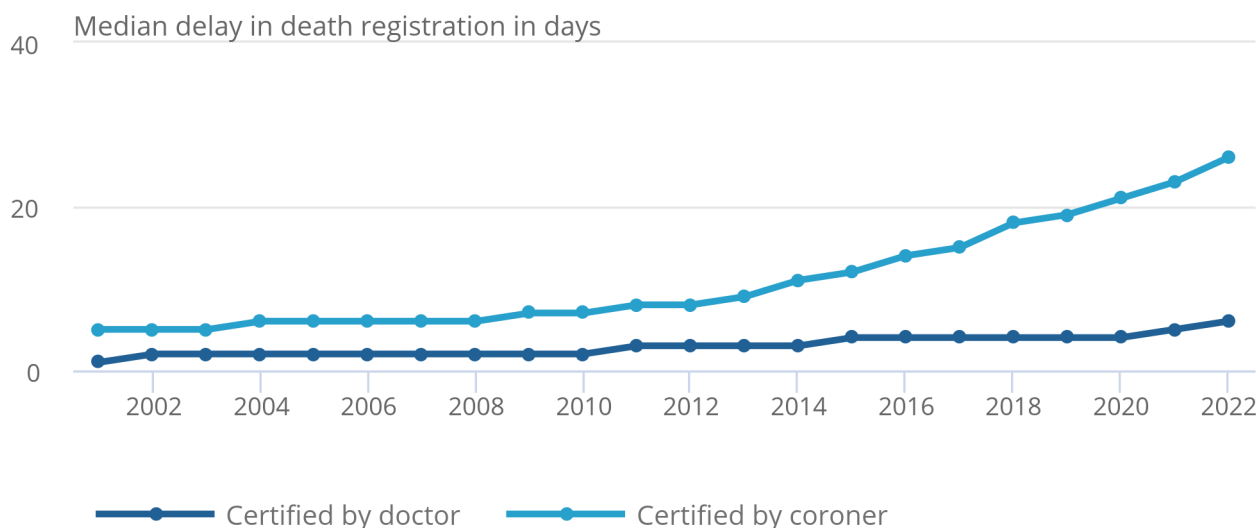
The median time between a death occurring and being registered (registration delay) in England and Wales was seven days in 2022, two days more than in 2021. Deaths certified by coroners had a median registration delay of 26 days compared with six days for deaths certified by doctors. The median delay for deaths certified by a coroner has increased every year since 2012, from eight days in 2012 to 26 days in 2022.

**Figure 2: Registration delays for deaths certified by a coroner have increased every year since 2012**

Median death registration delay in days by year of registration and certification type, England and Wales, 2001 to 2022

Figure 2: Registration delays for deaths certified by a coroner have increased every year since 2012

Median death registration delay in days by year of registration and certification type, England and Wales, 2001 to 2022



Source: Impact of registration delays on mortality statistics from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Figures include deaths of non-residents.
2. Registrations that do not provide enough information to calculate the delay are excluded.

For specific causes of death that are more likely to require coroners' inquests (alcohol-specific, suicide, drug-related, neonatal and post-neonatal deaths), timeliness decreased greatly in comparison with other causes. In 2022, drug-related deaths continued to have the highest median registration delay. Median registration delay for drug-related deaths increased, from 192 days in 2020, to 211 days in 2021 to 225 days in 2022.

## 3 . Impact of registration delays on mortality statistics data

[Impact of registration delays on mortality statistics](#)

Dataset | Released 9 July 2024

Data for England and Wales on the time taken to register deaths by cause of death, age, sex, certification type and area of usual residence. Includes analysis on infant deaths.

## 4 . Glossary

### Coroner

A coroner is a public official responsible for the investigation of violent, sudden, or suspicious deaths.

### Inquest

An inquest is an inquiry into the cause of an unexplained, sudden, or violent death held by a coroner.

### Registration delay

Mortality statistics are compiled from information supplied when deaths are certified and registered as part of civil registration, a legal requirement. According to the [Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953](#), a death should be registered within five days unless it is referred to a coroner for investigation. Mortality statistics for a given time period can be based on occurrence (death date) or registration (registration date); registration delay is the difference between date of occurrence and date of registration.

## 5 . Data sources and quality

Quality and methodology information on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created is available in our [Mortality statistics in England and Wales QMI](#) and [User guide to mortality statistics](#).

### Accredited official statistics

Our mortality accredited official statistics were independently reviewed by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) in February 2013. These mortality statistics on the impact of registration delays were reviewed by OSR in 2019 and in 2023. They comply with the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) and should be labelled "accredited official statistics".

## Data coverage, timeliness, and registration delays

Mortality data give complete population coverage. They ensure the estimates are precise and are representative of the underlying population at risk.

At the Office for National Statistics, most mortality publications are based on the date of death registration, including our [Weekly deaths in England and Wales bulletin](#) and our [Deaths registered monthly in England and Wales bulletin](#). Using registration data allows us to produce timely statistics that are stable over time, and comparable across locations.

A limitation of these data is that we are only aware that a death has occurred and can include it in our figures when it is registered, and there can be a delay between death occurrence and registration. In England and Wales, deaths should be registered within five days of the death occurring, but there are some situations that result in the death registration being delayed, occasionally extending into years. To understand the impact of delays in registration on mortality statistics, it is important to understand the nature of these delays and monitor changes over time.

Deaths that are considered unexpected, accidental, suspicious, unnatural or where there are concerns about the cause of death may be referred to a coroner. The coroner may order a post-mortem or carry out a full inquest to ascertain the reasons for the death. The coroner can only register the death once an investigation is concluded, and they are satisfied that the death has been thoroughly investigated with a correctly certified cause of death. The time taken to investigate the circumstances of the death can often result in a death registration exceeding the five-day period. Further information on coroner statistics can be found on the [GOV.UK website](#).

## Methodology

As a way of measuring the quality of the mortality data, it is important to regularly assess the impact of registration delays. This article looks at registration delays, how this has changed over time, and what factors influence the delay, such as cause of death. Causes of death are coded using the World Health Organization's (WHO) International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10). More information on cause of death coding can be found in our [User guide to mortality statistics](#).

In this article, registration delays have been grouped into the following categories for analysis:

- median registration delay in days
- lower quartile of registration delay in days
- upper quartile of registration delay in days

Deaths that do not contain sufficient information to calculate the registration delay have been excluded from all analyses. This is usually when the date of death occurrence is missing from the death certificate. Therefore, figures may not match those published elsewhere or previous versions of this publication. In 2022, of the 577,160 deaths registered in England and Wales, 577,158 had a valid date of death occurrence as well as registration.

This article focuses on delays based on registration year. This is because data based on registration year are seen as complete. This means that the numbers of deaths taking over a year to be registered will not need to be revised in following years. However, a death occurrence can be registered at any point after the death, meaning that these numbers will need to be revised each year. Information based on year of occurrence is available in our [accompanying dataset](#).

For analysis on 2022 deaths registration data, see our [Deaths registered in England and Wales bulletin](#), and our [Deaths registered weekly in England and Wales, provisional bulletin](#).

Further information can be found in the [2021 edition of this release](#).

## 6 . Related links

[Deaths registered weekly in England and Wales, provisional](#)

Bulletin | updated weekly

Provisional number of deaths registered in England and Wales in the latest weeks.

[Deaths registered in England and Wales](#)

Bulletin | Released 15 December 2023

Registered deaths by age, sex, selected underlying causes of death and the leading causes of death.

Contains death rates and death registrations by area of residence and single year of age.

[Deaths registered monthly in England and Wales](#)

Dataset | updated monthly

Number of deaths registered each month by area of usual residence for England and Wales, by region, county, health authorities, local and unitary authority, and London borough.

## 7 . Cite this article

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 9 July 2024, ONS website, article, [Impact of registration delays on mortality statistics in England and Wales: 2022](#)