

Statistical bulletin

Quarterly suicide death registrations in England: 2001 to 2019 registrations and Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) to Quarter 2 (Apr to June) 2020 provisional data

Provisional rate and number of suicide deaths registered in England per quarter. Includes 2001 to 2019 registrations and provisional data for Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) and Quarter 2 (Apr to June) 2020.

Contact:
Alison Brookman, Ben Windsor-Shellard
health.data@ons.gov.uk
+44 (0)1633 651901

Release date:
1 September 2020

Next release:
To be announced

Table of contents

1. [Main points](#)
2. [Quarterly suicides](#)
3. [Change in the standard of proof used by coroners in England and Wales](#)
4. [Quarterly suicide data](#)
5. [Glossary](#)
6. [Measuring the data](#)
7. [Strengths and limitations](#)
8. [Related links](#)

1 . Main points

- Provisional data show there were 10.3 suicide deaths per 100,000 people in Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2020 in England, equivalent to 1,262 registered deaths; in Quarter 2 (Apr to June) 2020 there were 6.9 suicide deaths per 100,000 people, equivalent to 845 registered deaths.
- The lower number of deaths registered caused by suicide in Quarter 2 of 2020 should be interpreted with caution; this likely reflects delays to inquests because of the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on the coroner's service.
- Among males, there were 15.8 suicide deaths per 100,000 males in Quarter 1 2020 (946 registered deaths) and 10.9 deaths per 100,000 in Quarter 2 (651 registered deaths).
- For females, there were 5.1 suicide deaths per 100,000 females in Quarter 1 2020 (316 registered deaths) and 3.1 deaths per 100,000 in Quarter 2 (194 registered deaths).
- The rate observed in Quarter 1 of 2020 for males is consistent with those observed in previous years, where the rate has seen an upward trend; the rate for females in Quarter 1 of 2020 continues to be like those seen in recent years.

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.

If you are struggling to cope, please call Samaritans for 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.

2 . Quarterly suicides

Less than one in four of the suicides registered so far in 2020 had a date of death that was also in 2020

The data reported in this release cannot be used to show the number of suicides with a date of death in 2020, including those that occurred during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Of the 2,107 suicides registered in England between January and June of 2020, less than a quarter of these had a date of death that was also in 2020 (460 deaths or 21.8%). This is in-line with expectation given coroner involvement with the investigation of these deaths, and the amount of time it takes to hold an inquest.

All deaths caused by suicide in England are investigated by coroners. Given the length of time it takes to hold an inquest (around five months), we do not currently know the total number of suicides that occurred during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Looking at Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) of 2020 specifically, 3.6% of the 1,262 suicides registered in this period had a date of death in the same period (45 deaths), with the remaining deaths (96.4% or 1,217 deaths) occurring before 2020.

For Quarter 2 (Apr to June) of 2020, 5.3% of the 845 suicides registered in the period occurred in the same period (45 deaths), with the remaining deaths occurring in the first quarter of 2020 (43.7% or 369 deaths) or prior to 2020 (51.0% or 431 deaths).

The number of suicides registered in the second quarter of 2020 is lower than expected and should be interpreted with caution

The 845 suicides registered in the second quarter of 2020 is the lowest number of any quarter since 2001, when the time series reported for this statistical release begins.

These numbers should be interpreted with caution. It is likely that the lower number of suicides registered in this period reflects the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on the coroner's service in England and Wales, for example, delays to inquests caused by the service adapting to social distancing measures. It is unlikely that the reduction in registered deaths reflects a genuine reduction in the number of suicides. We will continue to monitor and update the statistics on a quarterly basis.

When looking at the average number of deaths registered in each week of the month in 2020 (see Table 1), there is a clear reduction in the number of deaths registered in the second quarter. For April to June 2020, the number of suicide registrations is around 30% lower than the average number of registrations during the same period between 2015 and 2019.

Table 1: Average number of suicides registered in England in each week of the month in 2020 and the previous five years (2015 to 2019)

Month	2020	2015 to 2019
January	100	78
February	95	95
March	96	91
April	59	87
May	64	92
June	72	96

Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes

1. The National Statistics definition of suicide is given in "Glossary".
2. Figures concern the total number of registered deaths for each month, divided by the number of weeks for each period.
3. Figures are for people aged 10 years and above.
4. Figures are for usual residents of England, based on the latest postcode boundaries.
5. Figures are for deaths registered, rather than for deaths occurring in each period. Owing to the length of time it takes to complete a coroner's inquest, it can take months or even years for a suicide to be registered. See "Measuring the data" for more information.

3 . 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. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) will monitor and report the impact of this change when more evidence is available.

4 . Quarterly suicide data

[Deaths caused by suicide by quarter in England](#)

Dataset | Released 1 September 2020

Provisional rate and number of suicide deaths registered in England per quarter. Includes 2001 to 2019 registrations and provisional data for Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) and Quarter 2 (Apr to June) 2020.

5 . Glossary

Suicide

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](#).

Year of registration

Figures are based on deaths registered in each calendar year, rather than the date on which the death occurs.

Registration delay

The registration delay refers to the time lag between the date of death (that is, when the death occurred) and the date the death was registered. For further information on the impact of registration delays, see [Section 6](#).

Age-standardised mortality rate

Age-standardised mortality rate in this bulletin refers to a weighted average of the age-specific mortality rates per 100,000 people and standardised to the 2013 European Standard Population. They allow for differences in the age structure of populations and therefore allow valid comparisons to be made between geographic areas, the sexes and over time.

Statistical significance

The term "significant" refers to changes or differences based on unrounded figures. Significance has been determined using the 95% [confidence intervals](#), where instances of non-overlapping confidence intervals between figures indicate the difference is unlikely to have arisen from random fluctuation.

6 . Measuring the data

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", which is 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 ([Suicide occurrences, England and Wales](#)) show 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 2001 to 2018 rate calculations whilst [2018-based ONS population projections](#) were used for 2020 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 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 mortality rates.

Quarters 1 and 2 (2020) population:

$$\left(\text{population}_{2019}(i) + \left((\text{population}_{2020}(i) - \text{population}_{2019}(i)) * \left(\frac{m}{M} \right) \right) \right) * \left(\frac{N}{M} \right)$$

where:

- m is the number of days from 1 July 2019 (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 1 (Jan to Mar) 2020
- M is the number of days in 2020
- (j) is the age group

Quality and methodology

More quality and methodology information on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created, including the change in the standard of proof, is available in the [Suicide rates in the UK QMI](#). It is also explained in this article: [New standard of proof for suicide at inquests in England and Wales](#).

7 . Strengths and limitations

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

Quarterly data for 2020 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 2020 will be finalised in the annual [Suicides in the UK](#) release in 2021.

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](#).

8 . Related links

[Suicides in England and Wales: 2019 registrations](#)

Bulletin | Released 1 September 2020

Registered deaths in England and Wales from suicide analysed by sex, age, area of usual residence of the deceased and suicide method.