



NR
**Head of Vital Statistics & Administrative
Research and Support Branch**

1st Floor
Colby House
Stranmillis Court
BELFAST BT9 5RR
Tel No: **I&S**
Email: **NR**@nisra.gov.uk

FROM: **Name Redacted**
Head of Vital Statistics Unit

DATE: **22 December 2020**

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TO: **Robin Swann, MLA**

**PRE RELEASE ACCESS: COVID-19 RELATED DEATHS AND PRE-EXISTING CONDITIONS
IN NORTHERN IRELAND: MARCH – NOVEMBER 2020**

Issue: Pre-release access to 'Covid-19 related deaths and pre-existing conditions in Northern Ireland: March-November 2020'

Timing: The statistics will be published tomorrow, Wednesday 23rd December, at 9.30am.

Presentational Issues: The report includes analyses of the presence, number and type of pre-existing conditions that were reported alongside Covid-19 on death registrations. The figures and accompanying Statistical Press Notice are likely to attract significant media attention. The relevant officials in NISRA will handle any statistical queries that may arise.

Freedom of Information: This submission is fully disclosable.

Legislation Implications: None.

Recommendation: You are invited to note the key findings of the statistical report, a copy of which is attached for information.

Background

1. The NISRA publication planned for release at 9.30am on 23rd December, provides an analysis of Covid-19 related deaths with particular focus on pre-existing conditions, which are defined as any mention on the death certificate of a condition that pre-dated or was independent of Covid-19.
2. The analysis is based on death registration information collected by the General Register Office and therefore includes all deaths occurring where Covid-19 was mentioned on the death certificate by the doctor who certified the death, whether or not Covid-19 was the underlying cause of death. The figures include cases where the doctor noted that there was suspected or probable coronavirus infection involved in the death.
3. Two separate time periods are considered within the report: (1) Covid-19 related deaths registered from 1st March to 30th November 2020, in order to utilise the most up-to-date information to give the fullest indication of the prevalence of pre-existing conditions in Covid-19 related deaths; and (2) a more detailed analysis based on data from 1st March to 30th September 2020, which relies on the coding of cause of death text fields and thus enables pre-existing conditions by number and type to be examined.
4. The NISRA Statistics Press Notice is attached at Annex A. Main points of interest outlined in the report include:

Key Points

- There were 1,406 Covid-19 related deaths registered in Northern Ireland between 1st March and 30th November 2020;
- Covid-19 was reported in the causal chain of events for 1,263 deaths (89.8%);
- For 114 Covid-19 related deaths (8.1%), there were no pre-existing conditions.

Over the period March to September 2020:

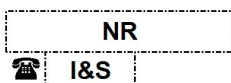
- There were 902 Covid-19 related deaths registered in Northern Ireland between 1st March and 30th September 2020;
 - Covid-19 was the underlying cause of death for 807 deaths (89.5% of Covid-19 related deaths);
 - There were no pre-existing conditions for 77 deaths (8.5% of Covid-19 related deaths).
 - The average number of pre-existing conditions was 2.32;
 - Dementia and Alzheimer's disease was the most common pre-existing condition, appearing in 327 deaths (36.3% of Covid-19 related deaths);
 - The next most common pre-existing conditions were hypertensive diseases (180) and diabetes (165 deaths); and
 - The main pre-existing condition – the one most likely to cause death in the absence of Covid-19 – was dementia and Alzheimer's disease (297), followed by ischaemic heart diseases (81) and chronic lower respiratory diseases (67 deaths).
5. Recipients are reminded that these are Official Statistics to which you have received pre-release access under the Pre-Release access to Official Statistics (NI) Order 2009. Recipients of pre-release statistics are cautioned:
 - to ensure that the statistics, or any information based on them, or any indication of the content is not made available to others;


**OFFICIAL – SENSITIVE: Official Statistics embargoed until 9.30am on 23rd December 2020.
For named Individuals only.**

- not to seek changes to release dates; and
- to make the statistician responsible for the statistics aware of any accidental release of the information to others immediately.

Wrongful release includes indications of the content, including descriptions such as "favourable" or "unfavourable". Please prevent inappropriate use by treating this information as restricted. Recipients should note that a list of those who receive privileged early access is publicly available on the NISRA website.

Recommendation: You are invited to note the key findings of the statistical report 'Covid-19 related deaths and pre-existing conditions in Northern Ireland: March-November 2020'.



cc: Mark Ovens (DoH SPAD)
Richard Pengelly (Permanent Secretary, DoH)
Michael McBride (Chief Medical Officer)
Siobhan Carey (NISRA Chief Executive and Registrar General)
David Gordon (Head of Communications, DoH)
Eugene Mooney (Senior Principal Statistician, DOH)
Mark McLaughlin (Head of Communications, DoF)
 (DoH Press Office)

Annex A

**STATISTICS PRESS NOTICE –
Covid-19 related deaths and
pre-existing conditions in Northern
Ireland: March-November 2020**



9:30am Wednesday 23rd December 2020

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) has today published a report on pre-existing conditions associated with Covid-19 related deaths in Northern Ireland.

Between 1st March and 30th September 2020, there were 902 Covid-19 related deaths registered in Northern Ireland. Covid-19 was the underlying cause of death (that is, the disease or injury which initiated the train of morbid events leading directly to death) for 807 deaths (89.5% of Covid-19 related deaths).

Pre-existing conditions are defined as any mention on the death certificate of a condition that pre-dated or was independent of Covid-19. The average number of pre-existing conditions was 2.32; slightly higher for males (2.40) compared to females (2.24). There were no pre-existing conditions for 77 of the 902 Covid-19 related deaths (8.5%).

Dementia and Alzheimer's disease was the most common pre-existing condition, appearing in 327 of the 902 Covid-19 related deaths (36.3%). The next most common pre-existing conditions were hypertensive diseases (180) and diabetes (165 deaths).

The main pre-existing condition, the one most likely to cause death in the absence of Covid-19, was dementia and Alzheimer's disease (297), followed by ischaemic heart diseases (81) and chronic lower respiratory diseases (67 deaths).

During October and November 2020, a further 504 Covid-19 related deaths were registered, of which 37 deaths (7.3%) had no pre-existing conditions. At present, there is insufficient information to identify the number and type of pre-existing conditions over this two-month period.

Over the entire period between 1st March and 30th November 2020, there were 1,406 Covid-19 related deaths registered in Northern Ireland, including 114 deaths (8.1%) without pre-existing conditions.

NISRA

December 2020

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. A detailed report on Covid-19 related deaths and pre-existing conditions can be found at:
<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/covid-19-related-deaths-and-pre-existing-conditions>
2. Statistics on weekly deaths registered in Northern Ireland can be found at:
<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/weekly-deaths>
3. Differences between NISRA's death registration statistics and the daily totals reported via the Department of Health are as follows:
 - The **daily updates** provided by the Department of Health (DoH) count the number of deaths reported by Trusts, where the deceased had a positive test for Covid-19 and died within 28 days, whether or not Covid-19 was the cause of death. DoH figures will not capture all deaths that do not meet this definition. These data are important because they are available earlier, and therefore give a quicker indication of what is happening day by day and are broadly comparable with the figures released daily in other parts of the United Kingdom (UK). The DoH reported 561 deaths associated with Covid-19 by 31st August 2020 (including revisions up to 28th September).
 - These statistics, like the NISRA weekly, provisional death statistics, are based on death registration information collected by the General Register Office, and count all deaths where Covid-19 was mentioned on the death certificate by the doctor who certified the death, whether or not Covid-19 was the primary underlying cause of death. The figures include cases where the doctor noted that there was suspected or probable coronavirus infection involved in the death. As a result totals from this source will usually be higher than the relevant daily figures - because the DoH daily updates only include those who have tested positive for the virus.
4. Death statistics based on underlying cause are published quarterly. Latest figures are for deaths registered up to the end of September 2020 and are available at
<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/registrar-general-quarterly-tables-2020>
5. All media queries to Department of Finance Press Office at dof.pressoffice@finance-ni.gov.uk or on Tel: I&S Out of office hours please contact the Duty Press Officer on I&S and your call will be returned.
6. Further information on the statistics provided in this publication can be obtained from NISRA Customer Services at:
Telephone: I&S E-mail: demography@nisra.gov.uk
Responsible Statistician: NR