# Suspected drug deaths rise by nearly 20% in Scotland despite safer consumption room opening



Suspected drug-related deaths in Scotland have risen by nearly 20% between December 2024 and February 2025, according to recently published figures by Public Health Scotland. The period saw 251 suspected drug deaths, averaging 21 fatalities per week. This increase occurred during the timeframe when the UK’s first safer drugs consumption room opened in Glasgow in January 2025.

Comparing the recent quarter to the preceding three months, the number of suspected drug deaths increased by 17%, from 215 to 251. However, when viewed year-on-year, the figures reveal a decline. During the three months starting December 2023, there were 304 suspected drug deaths, representing a 17% higher total than the recent quarter. Likewise, the total of 251 deaths is 12% lower than the 285 suspected drug deaths reported from December 2022 to February 2023.

In addition to mortality data, Public Health Scotland reported a decrease in drug-related emergency department attendances, with 977 recorded from December 2024 to February 2025. This represents a 9% reduction compared to the previous three months and a 14% decrease relative to the same period a year earlier.

Despite some improvements in certain indicators, the Rapid Action Drug Alerts and Response (RADAR) report highlighted that drug-related harms remain significantly high. It noted a “notable rise in suspected drug deaths compared to the previous quarter” and presented intelligence suggesting Scotland’s drug markets are increasingly contaminated. The contamination is believed to involve toxic synthetic substances, which escalate the risk of overdose and death.

Health Secretary Neil Gray addressed the issue, emphasising concern over an “increasingly toxic and unpredictable drug supply” and the rising challenge posed by polydrug use — the consumption of multiple substances simultaneously. Speaking to The Herald, Mr Gray said: “While this publication records a quarter-on-quarter rise in suspected drug deaths, it also notes the year-on-year fall. We continue to monitor the situation and are working hard to respond to the growing threat from polydrug use, including ‘street benzos’ and cocaine, and from highly dangerous synthetic opioids like nitazenes in an increasingly toxic and unpredictable drug supply.”

He added: “Such synthetics increase the risk of overdose, hospitalisation and death and are being found in a range of substances.” Mr Gray urged people to carry additional naloxone kits due to the strength of these substances, noting that the kits can reverse the effects of an overdose.

The Health Secretary further outlined efforts underway as part of the Scottish Government’s five-year, £250 million National Mission on Drugs. Initiatives include planning for drug-checking facilities to enable rapid response to emerging drug trends, the Glasgow pilot safer drug consumption room, expanded access to residential rehabilitation, treatment, and distribution of life-saving naloxone.

Mr Gray stated, “We want every person experiencing harm from drug use to be able access the support they need... Every drugs death is a tragedy, and ministers are determined to continue our efforts to reduce harm and deaths.”

The rise in suspected drug deaths prompted remarks from political figures as well. Labour health spokesperson Jackie Baillie acknowledged the challenges the figures represent, saying in a statement reported by The Herald: “There is no room for complacency when it comes to Scotland’s drugs death crisis.” She welcomed the safe consumption room pilot but stressed that it should not replace coordinated efforts to halt drug supply from criminal gangs. Ms Baillie called on the Scottish Government to collaborate with Police Scotland, local authorities, and health boards to hold those profiting from drug trafficking accountable while ensuring victims receive the best support for recovery.

The recent data coincide with ongoing debates about how best to address Scotland’s high levels of drug-related harm, particularly in the context of emerging synthetic substances that increase risks and the complex challenge of polydrug use. The opening of the safer consumption room in Glasgow marks a significant development in harm reduction strategies, though the increase in deaths over the winter months underscores continuing difficulties within Scotland’s drug crisis landscape.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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3. <https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/official-report/search-what-was-said-in-parliament/%20CJ-01-05-2024?iob=135183&meeting=15831> - This Scottish Parliament meeting transcript discusses the rise in suspected drug deaths and the implementation of harm reduction strategies, supporting the article's mention of increased deaths and the opening of the safer consumption room.
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