# Avoidable deaths in Scotland rise sharply in 2023 reversing two decades of decline



A recent report from the National Records of Scotland (NRS) has revealed alarming figures regarding avoidable deaths in the country, which stood at 16,548 in 2023. This marks a troubling rise from pre-pandemic levels, indicating a departure from the downward trend that had been observed since 2001. Public health experts underscore the critical nature of these statistics, which confirm that many of these deaths could have been prevented through effective public health measures and timely medical interventions.

Cancer remains the leading cause of avoidable mortality in Scotland, a position it has held for several years, despite a gradual decline in rates. Following cancer, diseases of the circulatory system represent another significant cause of premature fatalities. Notably, alcohol and drug-related deaths have surged, contributing to almost one in six of all avoidable deaths this past year. The NRS reports that these particular deaths have reached their third highest level since 2001, surpassed only by the peak figures recorded during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The 2023 statistics further illustrate stark inequalities in health outcomes across different demographics. Individuals residing in the most deprived areas of Scotland are reportedly four times more likely to experience avoidable mortality compared to their counterparts in the least deprived regions. Moreover, there is a concerning trend in gender discrepancies, with males exhibiting higher rates of avoidable deaths than females. Assistant Statistician Stefania Sechi remarked on the pattern of mortality, stating, "The rate of avoidable deaths decreased over most years from 2001, but increased suddenly during the pandemic. Although figures have since come down, the current rates remain higher than those recorded before the pandemic."

In terms of geographical variations, Glasgow City reported the highest rates of avoidable deaths, while areas such as East Dunbartonshire and East Renfrewshire noted the lowest. This regional disparity suggests that targeted public health initiatives are urgently needed to address the significant differences in health outcomes across the country.

The definition of 'avoidable mortality' is crucial in understanding the data. According to international standards set by the OECD and Eurostat, it focuses on deaths under the age of 75 that could primarily be prevented through public health measures or medical treatment. Treatment-related mortality refers to deaths that could be avoided through timely healthcare interventions. Experts advocate for increased investment in public health programmes, particularly in communities most affected by preventable health issues.

As Scotland approaches the publication of further mortality statistics in 2025, these findings raise pressing questions about the effectiveness of current health policies and the need for renewed efforts in public health interventions. The latest data underscore a critical moment for health authorities in Scotland, as they grapple with rising mortality rates and seek strategies to combat these ongoing health challenges.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25210920.scotland-highest-avoidable-death-rate-britain/?ref=rss), [[4]](https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/vital-events/deaths/avoidable-mortality)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25210920.scotland-highest-avoidable-death-rate-britain/?ref=rss), [[6]](https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/scotland-tops-uks-unavoidable-death-rate-list-1427833), [[5]](https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/news/2022/avoidable-mortality-in-scotland-2020)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/news/2024/excess-deaths-fall-in-2023), [[3]](https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/publications/vital-events-reference-tables-2023/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/scotland-tops-uks-unavoidable-death-rate-list-1427833), [[7]](https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/news/2022)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25210920.scotland-highest-avoidable-death-rate-britain/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/news/2024/excess-deaths-fall-in-2023> - In 2023, Scotland experienced 63,445 deaths, a 1% increase from 2022. This figure aligns with expected levels, indicating a return to pre-pandemic mortality rates. The total fertility rate also declined to 1.30, the lowest recorded. Notably, deaths among those aged 80 and over were 1.6% above expected levels, while deaths in younger age groups were below expectations. The report highlights a significant decrease in excess deaths following the pandemic, with the number of deaths returning to expected levels in 2023.
3. <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/publications/vital-events-reference-tables-2023/> - The Vital Events Reference Tables 2023 provide comprehensive statistics on deaths in Scotland, including a total of 63,445 deaths registered in 2023, a 1% increase from 2022. The age-standardised mortality rate was 1,166 per 100,000 people. The report also details leading causes of death, with ischaemic heart disease accounting for 11% and dementia and Alzheimer's disease for 10% of all deaths. Additionally, it discusses excess deaths, noting that deaths in 2023 were broadly in line with expected levels, with an excess of 0.2% above the expected number of deaths.
4. <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/vital-events/deaths/avoidable-mortality> - The Avoidable Mortality section provides data on deaths in Scotland that are considered preventable or treatable through public health or healthcare interventions. The latest update, as of November 2022, includes statistics on avoidable mortality rates, causes, and demographic breakdowns. The publication offers insights into trends over time and variations across different regions and communities within Scotland, highlighting areas where public health and healthcare interventions could be most effective in reducing avoidable deaths.
5. <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/news/2022/avoidable-mortality-in-scotland-2020> - In 2020, Scotland recorded 17,153 avoidable deaths, accounting for 27% of all deaths that year. This marked a 9% increase from 2019, largely attributed to COVID-19 deaths. The leading causes of avoidable mortality were cancers (29%) and circulatory diseases (25%). Alcohol and drug-related deaths continued to rise for the ninth consecutive year. The report also highlighted significant disparities, with avoidable mortality rates in the most deprived areas nearly four times higher than in the least deprived areas.
6. <https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/scotland-tops-uks-unavoidable-death-rate-list-1427833> - Scotland has the highest rate of avoidable deaths in the UK, with 301 deaths per 100,000 people. This suggests that nearly 16,000 individuals died prematurely in Scotland. The most common causes of avoidable deaths include heart disease, certain cancers, respiratory diseases, and type 2 diabetes. The report also notes that the highest rates of avoidable deaths were in Glasgow City, while the lowest were in Shetland. Experts emphasize the need for targeted public health interventions to address these disparities.
7. <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/news/2022> - In 2021, more than a quarter of all deaths in Scotland were considered avoidable, according to analysis by National Records of Scotland. The rate of avoidable deaths in 2021 was 4% higher than the previous year. Half of the increase in the latest year is attributable to COVID-19 deaths which are considered preventable. Cancers and circulatory diseases were the most common causes of avoidable mortality in 2021, accounting for 28% and 25% of all avoidable deaths respectively.