
An Official Statistics publication for Scotland
Publication date: 12 June 2018

About this release
This release by Information Services Division (ISD) presents information from the National Drug-Related Deaths Database (NDRDD) for Scotland on deaths which occurred in 2015 and 2016, with trend data from 2009. Data from the NDRDD provide detailed information on drug-related deaths in Scotland, highlighting potential areas for intervention. Information is provided on deaths involving controlled drugs which were classed as either non-intentional (accidental or of undetermined intent) or intentional (deaths by suicide).

Main Points
The NDRDD includes 865 deaths which occurred in 2016, of which 818 were classed as non-intentional (in 2015, 643 of 695 deaths were non-intentional). The following main points focus on non-intentional deaths:

- The age of individuals who had a drug-related death increased from 34.9 years in 2009 to 41.0 years in 2016, reflecting the ageing profile of people with problematic drug use. The percentage of drug-related deaths which occurred among women increased from 2009 (21%) to 2016 (29%).
- In 2016, heroin or morphine (61%), alcohol (49%) and anti-depressants (47%) were the most common substances present at post mortem.

Most Common Drugs Present at Post Mortem
The percentage of deaths where etizolam (a benzodiazepine type 'Novel' Psychoactive Substance) was present increased from 9% in 2015 to 33% in 2016, while the presence of diazepam (a prescribed benzodiazepine) decreased from 66% to 46%.

Opioids (heroin/morphine, methadone or buprenorphine) were implicated in 77% of deaths in 2016.

Over half of individuals who died (55%) were in contact with drug treatment services in the six months prior to death. This percentage has increased since 2009.

Among people who had a drug-related death, prescribing of gabapentin or pregabalin (medications prescribed for epilepsy or chronic pain, which have been reported to enhance the effects of opioids) in the three months prior to death increased from 4% in 2009 to 21% in 2016.

**Background**

The definition of a drug-related death is based on the UK-wide definition used by National Records of Scotland for national reporting, which can be found [here](#). Summary statistics on drug-related deaths registered in 2015 and 2016 were previously published by National Records of Scotland. The National Drug-Related Deaths Database established at ISD facilitates detailed analysis of these deaths with the aim of providing further insights into the lives of those who died.

Surveillance of drug-related deaths is commonly undertaken by local critical incident monitoring groups. The process for identification of a drug-related death varies but will normally include collaboration between members of the critical incident monitoring group, the police and the local Procurator Fiscal. Each area has a Data Collection Co-ordinator who works closely with local critical incident monitoring groups and key partners. Their role is to collate the information on each drug-related death from data sources including police sudden death reports, pathology reports, GP and other clinical notes.

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**Further Information**

Find out more in the [full report](#). The data from this publication are available to download [from our web page](#).

Other ISD publications on drug and alcohol misuse can be found at the [ISD website](#).

The Scottish Public Health Observatory (ScotPHO) provides information on various aspects of drug misuse in Scotland: [ScotPHO drug misuse section](#).

The next release of this publication will be in 2020.

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**ISD and Official Statistics**

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