



Press release

Embargo: 29.8.2022, 8:30

14 Health

Causes of death statistics 2020

COVID-19 was the third most common cause of death in Switzerland in 2020

While there are usually around 70 000 deaths in Switzerland in a normal year, in the 2020 pandemic year there were 76 195 deaths, 12.4% more than in the previous year. This increase was due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The proportion of deaths with COVID-19 as the main cause of death was 12.2% in 2020, third only to cardiovascular disease (26.9%) and cancer (22.2%). These are some of the findings of the cause of death statistics from the Federal Statistical Office (FSO).

Through the ongoing mortality monitoring conducted by the FSO which monitors the weekly number of deaths, a first period of excess mortality was observed in March and April 2020. A second period occurred from October 2020 to January 2021. Overall in 2020, 8739 more people than expected (+ 46.9%) died in the age group 65 and above and in the under 65 age group, 301 more people than expected (+ 11.7%).

The first COVID-19 death of a 72-year-old woman on 5 March 2020 was reported to the FSO in the canton of Vaud. In 2020, 9294 people residing in Switzerland died with COVID-19 being the main cause of death. In the 65 and older age group, 4676 men and 4306 women died from COVID-19; while in the under 65 age group, 226 men and 86 women did so. This corresponds to an age-standardised mortality rate of 555.2 persons per 100 000 inhabitants in the 65 years and older age group and of 4.4 persons per 100 000 inhabitants in the under 65 age group.

More men than women and more older than younger people died from COVID-19

Of the COVID-19 deaths, 52.7% concerned men and 47.3% women. The difference between the sexes was particularly noticeable in the 0-64 age group, in which 72.4% of the cases concerned men and 27.6% women. In the 65 years and older age group, 52.1% of cases concerned men and 47.9% women. The mortality rate (age-standardised mortality rate per 100 000 inhabitants) due to COVID-19 was 64.8 for men and 35.5 for women.

Mortality due to COVID-19 rises considerably from age 65 onwards

Although older people in particular died more frequently from COVID-19, younger people were also affected including an infant and a toddler under 2 years of age. 15 people died from COVID-19 in the 15-44 age group and 295 people in the 45-64 age group. Between the ages of 65 and 75, 991 people died; between the ages of 75 and 85, 2847 died; and for those aged 85 and over, 5144 died. This equates to 2235 COVID-19 deaths per 100 000 inhabitants in this upper age group.

Potential years of life lost due to COVID-19

The indicator of potential years of life lost (PYLL) is an indicator of premature mortality. In the FSO's cause of death statistics, it refers to all deaths that occur before the age limit of 70. Thus, this indicator shows the importance of a disease for younger people. Among men 3357 and among women 1278 years of potential life were lost due to COVID-19. This corresponds to 13 times more PYLL for men and 9 times more PYLL for women than was the case for influenza.

This puts PYLL due to COVID-19 among men in 4th place after cancer, external causes and cardiovascular diseases and among women in 5th place after cancer, external causes, cardiovascular diseases and diseases of the respiratory organs. The calculated PYLLs tend to be rather low because the age limit of 70 years used is low compared with average life expectancy and COVID-19 affected mostly older people. For men who died from COVID-19, the average age was 82.2 years while for women it was 86.2 years.

Increases in cardiovascular diseases and external causes

In the ten years from 2010 to 2019, the mortality rate due to cardiovascular diseases decreased by 41.3% among men and by 41.3% among women. In 2020, 131 in 100 000 men and 87 in 100 000 women died from cardiovascular diseases. Compared with 2019, this represents an increase of 2.3% for men (+454 deaths) and a difference of 0.1% for women (+156 deaths).

The mortality rate due to external causes such as accidents and violence has decreased by 19.1% for men and by 11.5% for women over the past ten years. In 2020, 38 in 100 000 men and 19 in 100 000 women died from this cause. Compared with 2019, this represents a difference of 0.5% for men (+20 deaths) and an increase of 3.3% for women (+28 deaths).

Decline in cancer and respiratory diseases

Fewer and fewer people have also died of cancer in the past ten years. From 2010 to 2019, the mortality rate decreased by 23.2% among men and by 11.6% among women. In 2020, 138 in 100 000 men and 96 in 100 000 women died from cancer. Compared with 2019, this represents a decrease of 3.3% for both men (−98 deaths) and women (−164 deaths).

For deaths due to respiratory diseases, a stable course without major fluctuations has been seen over the past ten years. In 2020, 27 in 100 000 men and 17 in 100 000 women died from diseases of the respiratory organs. Compared with 2019, this represents a decrease of 17.6% for men (−383 deaths) and of 20.7% for women (−421 deaths).

Fewer suicides among men

The suicide rate has decreased slightly in the past ten years. Per 100 000 persons of each sex, it was 16.5 for men and 6.2 for women in 2010 and 14.6 for men (742 men) and 5.3 for women (276 women) in 2019. In 2020, 696 men and 276 women took their own lives. This corresponded to a suicide rate of 13.7 persons per 100 000 inhabitants for men and 5.4 persons per 100 000 inhabitants for women. This means that the number of suicides among men decreased by 6.2% compared with the previous year, while among women it remained exactly the same.

Cause of death statistics: basis of the survey

The cause of death statistics is based on the obligation of doctors to register every death in Switzerland. It is one of the oldest federal statistics and has been compiled since 1876. Diagnoses are classified according to World Health Organisation (WHO) policy. The figures published here include only deaths of persons resident in Switzerland.

The compilation of the cause of death statistics is an elaborate and complicated process. This is because the information on the approximately 70 000 death certificates issued by doctors each year must be coded in each individual case by highly specialised personnel according to WHO rules.

Further methodological explanations on the cause of death statistics and other death statistics at federal level can be found here:

[Official statistics on deaths, excess mortality, causes of death and notifiable diseases - Methodological explanations | Publication | Federal Statistical Office \(admin.ch\)](#)

Annual cause of death statistics and provisional cause of death statistics

The annual cause of death statistics and the monthly results of the provisional cause of death statistics may differ.

The provisional monthly results show the number of persons who died in a month at a specific evaluation time. Events recorded later are retrospectively added to already published provisional monthly results, therefore the sum of the provisional data of all twelve months of a year does not equal the total of the results of the statistical year.

COVID-19 pandemic and cause of death figures in 2021

The publication of the causes of death in 2021 will be continued at regular intervals like the provisional statistics of the causes of death in 2020 with monthly results. The first results for 2021 are planned for October 2022. A final assessment of the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be made until it is over and the causes of death for all affected years are available.

Information

Rolf Weitkunat, FSO, Population Health, tel.: +41 58 485 67 24, e-mail: rolf.weitkunat@bfs.admin.ch
FSO Media Office, tel.: +41 58 463 60 13, e-mail: media@bfs.admin.ch

Online

Further information and publications: www.bfs.admin.ch/news/en/2022-0202
Statistics counts for you: www.statistics-counts.ch
NewsMail subscription in German, French and Italian: www.news-stat.admin.ch
FSO website: www.statistics.admin.ch

Access to results

This press release has been established on the basis of the European Statistics Code of Practice, which ensures the independence, integrity and accountability of national and community statistical offices. Privileged access is supervised and under embargo.

The Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) received this press release two weeks before the embargo.