

Provisional death counts and excess mortality, January to March 2019 and January to March 2020

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COVID-19 has had unprecedented impacts on Canadians. Statistics Canada has adopted, and continues to adopt, new ways of working to provide Canadians with the data and insights they need to respond to COVID-19.

To meet the need for more timely information, a provisional dataset on deaths in Canada covering the first 13 weeks of 2019 and 2020 in a number of jurisdictions is now available. Data were provided by the following nine jurisdictions: Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, Quebec, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, and the Northwest Territories. The dataset includes demographic information on 87,186 people who died in these nine jurisdictions and for whom Statistics Canada received information on or before April 30, 2020.

The first death attributed to COVID-19 in Canada was reported to have occurred on March 8, 2020, in British Columbia. According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, there were 96 reported deaths in Canada related to COVID-19 as of March 31, 2020.

The provisional data set released today includes deaths from all causes. Increases and decreases in deaths can be due to causes other than COVID-19, including cancer, heart disease, stroke, transportation accidents, suicide, opioid overdoses, and other natural and external causes of death.

The data allow for the estimation of excess deaths for the first quarter of 2020 compared with the first quarter of 2019 and earlier years for the selected jurisdictions. Statistics Canada does not currently have the information on causes of death necessary to confirm that observed excess mortality can be attributed to COVID-19. Furthermore, the excess mortality data do not account for changes to the size of the population and its composition between 2019 and 2020. A more comprehensive analysis of excess mortality will be possible only when data on the causes of death become available and mortality rates are calculated.

As a measure of excess mortality, the number of people who died in a given week in 2020 can be compared with the number of deaths in the same week in 2019. For the period from January 1, 2020, to March 31, 2020, there were notable variations in the number of deaths that occurred weekly in all of the reporting jurisdictions. However, variations in weekly deaths are expected from year to year.

Estimates of excess mortality are based on provisional counts and are subject to change. Care should be taken when drawing conclusions from provisional data, as these counts do not necessarily include all deaths that occurred during this period.



Table 1
Estimated excess deaths, by week, selected jurisdictions, January 1, 2020, to March 31, 2020

	Newfoundl and and Labrador	Prince Edward Island	Nova Scotia	Quebec	Manitoba	Saskatche wan	Alberta	British Columbia	Northwest Territories
	excess deaths								
Total, all weeks	-13	2	-110	-1,257	-38	-33	374	-75	5
January 7, 2020	4	-7	-10	-82	-5	-12	63	-7	-3
January 14, 2020	-11	1	-5	-60	33	25	13	11	-3
January 21, 2020	-9	7	7	-77	32	43	33	74	0
January 28, 2020	0	2	-11	-108	21	-7	42	57	4
February 4, 2020	16	-5	-34	-2	12	-32	10	9	0
February 11, 2020	25	0	12	-34	-24	-24	-2	-43	0
February 18, 2020	-5	-3	-11	-197	-26	-24	-21	-41	-2
February 25, 2020	11	11	-22	-76	-35	11	-82	-4	1
March 3, 2020	-14	4	-11	-82	-9	0	81	-50	0
March 10, 2020	-13	1	18	-180	-7	10	8	-119	0
March 17, 2020	-17	3	-43	-142	-30	-25	104	-91	1
March 24, 2020	F	-9	F	-159	F	10	46	40	2
March 31, 2020	F	-3	F	-58	F	-8	79	89	5

F too unreliable to be published

Source(s): Canadian Vital Statistics: Death Database (3233).

For the period from January 1, 2020, to March 31, 2020, Alberta was the only jurisdiction among those included in the dataset where there were excess deaths in over three-quarters of the weeks in the period. Over this 13-week period, Alberta was also the province with the highest number of deaths in excess of those reported for the same period in 2019. Six reporting provinces (Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Quebec, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia) had a net decrease in deaths for this period, while Prince Edward Island and the Northwest Territories had a small number of excess deaths.

While excess mortality might be expected because of COVID-19, it is important to note that the period covered here includes only deaths reported up to the end of March 2020.

Statistics Canada will update these data monthly, adding new weeks of data as they become available. The data will be announced through an official release in Statistics Canada's *The Daily*.

Note to readers

The data released today are provisional death counts and may not match counts from other sources, such as media reports, or counts and estimates from provincial or territorial health authorities and other agencies. There are additional delays in receiving data from provincial and territorial vital statistics offices. Differences will also occur when different definitions and collection periods are used.

Statistics Canada's capacity to provide useful information depends on its ability to receive information from the provinces and territories. For several jurisdictions, this information is typically sent within 30 days of the death event, while for others it is sent 30 to 60 days following the death event. As a result, the data for Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, and Manitoba are suppressed for the weeks ending March 24 and 31, 2020.

Information about death events from Ontario and New Brunswick is received more than 60 days following the death. Owing to their incompleteness, the data for these provinces are suppressed.

Also owing to their incompleteness, the data for Nunavut are suppressed.

Data have not been received from Yukon since 2017.

These provisional data do not cover 100% of deaths in the reference period. For 2019, coverage is close to 100% but some deaths may not yet be included if they required additional analysis. For recent months, collection is ongoing and coverage is lower. In the future, and as collection progresses, these figures will be updated and coverage will increase. Coverage will vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction based on various factors including collection methods.

The number of deaths in Canada related to COVID-19 as of March 31 comes from the Public Health Agency of Canada's COVID-19 Outbreak Update (consulted May 11). For the most recent information, please refer to the [Public Health Agency of Canada's website](#).

Canada's national vital statistics system is a complex and decentralized system. It is based on collaboration between provincial and territorial vital statistics registrars and the federal government's representative, Statistics Canada.

Civil registration of births, deaths, stillbirths and marriages is the responsibility of the provinces and territories. Each provincial and territorial registrar operates under its own provincial or territorial Vital Statistics Act.

Statistics Canada is collaborating with provincial and territorial vital statistics offices to ensure they are all able to provide timely death data within the context of COVID-19, specifically on a weekly basis.

Available tables: table [13-10-0779-01](#).

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [3233](#).

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).