

# Provisional death counts and excess mortality, January to July 2020

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COVID-19 has had, and continues to have, a clear impact on communities and families across the country, and many have lost family members and friends. To understand both the direct and indirect consequences of the pandemic, it is important to measure excess mortality, which occurs when there are more deaths during a period of time than what would be expected for that period. It should be noted that, even without a pandemic, there is always some variation in the number of people who die in a given week from year to year. This means that the number of deaths that might be expected would mostly fall within a certain range of values.

There were more than 7,000 excess deaths across Canada from March to the start of June 2020. By July, the weekly number of deaths was within the range of what would be expected had there been no pandemic.

Today, as part of Statistics Canada's commitment to provide timely and relevant information on COVID-19 and its impact on Canadians, an updated provisional dataset from the Canadian Vital Statistics Death Database is now available which covers the period from March to the end of July. Updates were also made to the provisional death estimates, which have been adjusted to account for the incomplete nature of the counts, where possible. The provisional estimates will continue to be revised in future releases as more information is reported by provincial and territorial vital statistics agencies.

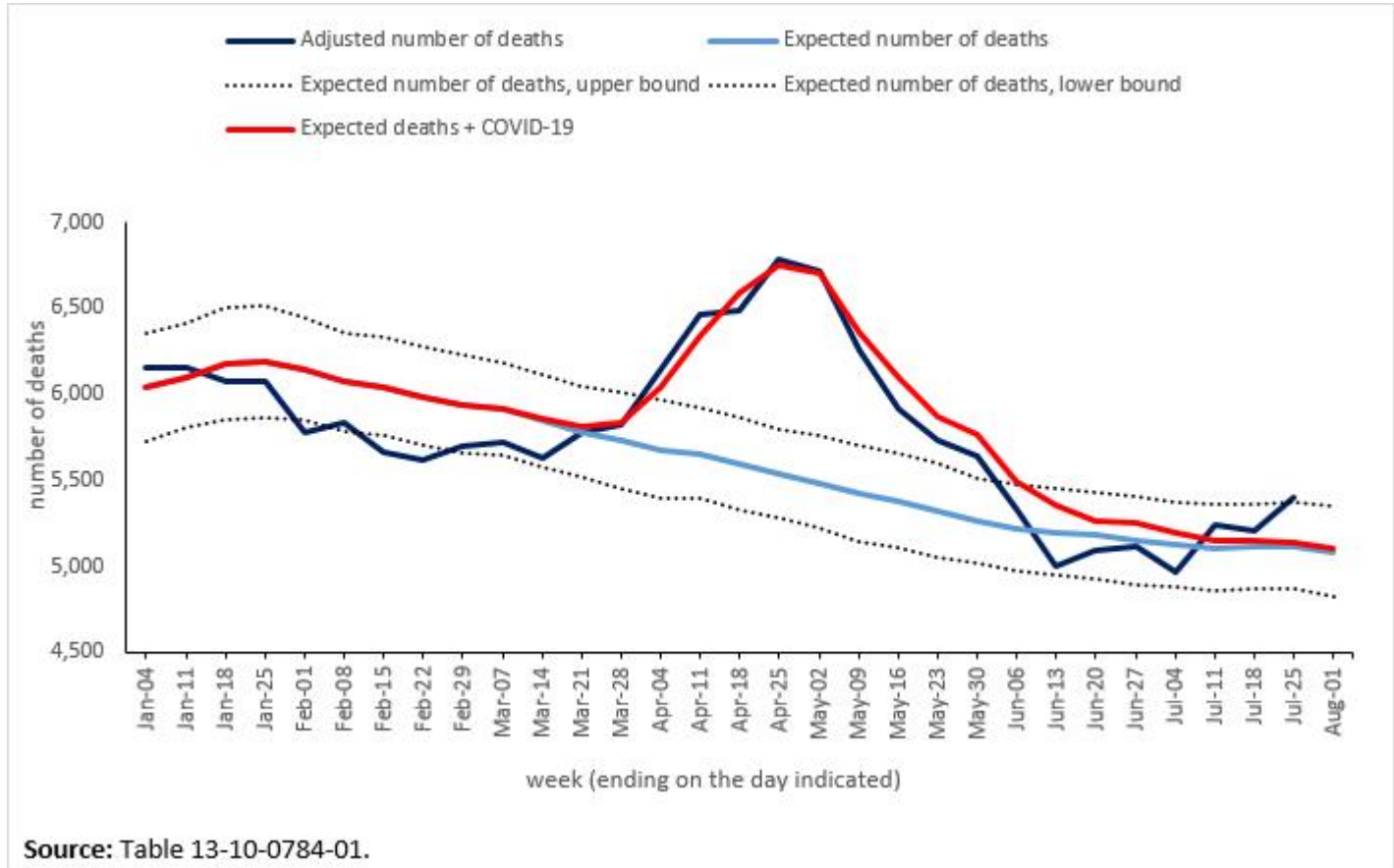
## **There were no clear signs of excess mortality in July, coinciding with a drop in the number of deaths caused by COVID-19**

Over the course of the spring, from the end of March to the start of June, there were an estimated 7,027 more deaths than what would have been expected if there was no pandemic. This was largely driven by the 7,575 deaths due to COVID-19 observed during this time.

In June, the number of deaths in Canada returned to expected levels had there not been a pandemic, where they remained throughout July. While deaths due to COVID-19 continued throughout this period, they were much fewer in number.



**Infographic 1 – Provisional adjusted weekly number of deaths, expected number of deaths and COVID-19 deaths, Canada**



The national story reflects trends within the largest provinces, where despite earlier periods of excess mortality, the number of deaths in July was within the range of what would have been expected if there was no pandemic. For example, in Quebec, the province hit hardest by the pandemic, an estimated 4,120 excess deaths were observed from March to the start of June. This was followed by a period with no excess deaths for the rest of June and all of July. This pattern was also apparent in Ontario, which had 2,086 excess deaths from March through May, followed by a decline to expected levels by June.

According to the provisional estimates, Alberta and British Columbia each experienced a single week in July where there were excess deaths. However, it is expected that the number of weekly deaths will occasionally fall outside the expected range regardless of a pandemic.

For the other reporting provinces and territories—Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut—there was no clear evidence of excess mortality over the course of July. That is to say that, based on the information reported, the number of weekly deaths in those jurisdictions is within the range of what would be expected if there was no pandemic.

**Among leading causes, only cancer led to more deaths in Canada than COVID-19 in April and May**

In April and May, COVID-19 was the underlying cause of death for more than one in eight deaths across Canada (15% in April and 12% in May). For these two months, it trailed only cancer among the leading causes of death.

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Statistics Canada will continue to provide timely information on a regular basis on excess deaths as it becomes available throughout the pandemic.

### Note to readers

*The data released today are provisional as they are not based on all deaths that occurred during the reference period due to reporting delays, and do not include Yukon. Provisional death counts are based on what is reported to Statistics Canada by the provincial and territorial vital statistics registries. Provisional death estimates have been adjusted to account for incomplete data, where possible. The numbers of excess deaths discussed in this analysis refer to provisional estimates. Information on the methods used can be found in the Definitions, data sources and methods section for Survey 3233— Vital Statistics - Death Database.*

*The provisional death counts and estimates released today for the first 31 weeks of 2020 may not match figures from other sources, such as media reports, or counts and estimates from provincial or territorial health authorities and other agencies.*

*Provisional death counts for the first 31 weeks of 2020 and provisional select grouped causes of death for the first seven months of 2020 are being released for all provinces and territories, except Yukon. Provisional estimates for the first 31 weeks of 2020 are being released for the following reporting provinces and territories: Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, Quebec, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia and the Northwest Territories. Provisional death counts for the first 24 weeks of 2020 in New Brunswick and in Nunavut, the first 27 weeks in Ontario and the first 30 weeks for Canada, are also being released.*

*References to the period from the end of March to the beginning of June refer to the period from the week ending March 28 to the week ending June 6. References to the period from March to July refer to the period from the week ending March 28 to the week ending August 1.*

*The number of deaths in Canada caused by COVID-19 come from the Canadian Vital Statistics Death Database. These deaths are certified by a medical professional, coroner or medical examiner as due to COVID-19 and officially registered in Canada. Previous releases referenced COVID-19 death information reported by the Public Health Agency of Canada based on data submitted by provincial and territorial authorities. The authoritative source for causes of death is the Canadian Vital Statistics Death Database.*

*To facilitate the identification of trends in the number of weekly deaths by age group and sex, and by province and territory, an interactive visual tool is available: [Weekly death counts: Interactive tool](#).*

**Available tables: [13-10-0768-01](#) and [13-10-0783-01](#) to [13-10-0785-01](#) .**

**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](mailto:STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca)) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; [STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca](mailto:STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca)).