

Deaths, 2021

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Increase in mortality from 2020 to 2021 entirely attributable to deaths among males

There were 311,640 deaths in Canada in 2021, an increase of 1.0% from 2020. While male deaths increased by 2.5%, female deaths declined by 0.5% compared with 2020.

In 2021, the largest increase in male deaths compared with 2020 was in the 45-to-64 years age group (+4.2%), whereas female deaths in this age group declined by 0.2%. Among those aged 65 years of age and older, male deaths increased by 1.7% while female deaths decreased by 0.9%.

Several provinces, namely Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Saskatchewan and British Columbia, and one territory (the Northwest Territories), saw an increase in deaths of at least 7.0% in 2021. In contrast, Quebec had the largest decline (-7.1%), followed by Manitoba (-3.3%) and Nunavut (-1.9%).

Life expectancy declines for men but increases for women

For the second year in a row, life expectancy at birth for Canadians fell in 2021, from 81.7 years to 81.6 years. This slight decrease of 0.1 years is, however, well below that observed from 2019 to 2020 (-0.6 years).

The decrease in life expectancy in Canada in 2021 was entirely attributable to men (-0.2 years) as a slight increase was noted for women (+0.1 years). In comparison, from 2019 to 2020, life expectancy decreased for both males (-0.7 years) and females (-0.4 years).

The latest figures for women show that life expectancy at birth fell significantly in Saskatchewan (-1.2 years) and British Columbia (-0.8 years) from 2020 to 2021, while it rose in Quebec (+1.0 years) and Manitoba (+0.8 years).

Among men, declines were seen in Saskatchewan (-0.8 years), Alberta (-0.9 years) and British Columbia (-0.8 years). Elsewhere, the variations observed from 2020 to 2021 remained within the annual fluctuations expected for men from year to year.

Elsewhere in the world, while many countries saw their life expectancy rebound in 2021, particularly in Western Europe, others saw further declines. This was particularly the case in the United States, where life expectancy at birth fell by 0.6 years from 2020 to 2021.

Cancer and heart disease remain the top two leading causes of death in Canada

Cancer was the leading cause of death in Canada in 2021, accounting for over one-quarter (26.6%, or 82,822) of all deaths in 2021, followed by heart disease at 17.7% (55,271). Compared with 2020, these numbers represent an increase of 2.0% in cancer deaths and of 1.6% in deaths attributable to heart disease. Cancer and heart disease were the top two leading causes of death for both women and men in 2021.

While cancer and heart disease affect Canadians of all ages, just over one-third (35.7%) of cancer deaths and over half (57.6%) of deaths attributed to heart disease occurred in people 80 years of age and older.

Accidental deaths rose in 2021, driven by increases in fatal overdoses and falls

Unintentional injuries (accidents) were the third leading cause of death in 2021, accounting for 6.2% (19,257) of all deaths. This represents a year-over-year increase in the number of accidental deaths of 14.5%. Deaths attributed to unintentional poisonings and accidental falls were the driving forces behind this increase.

An accidental poisoning resulting in death occurs when a person is exposed to a noxious substance such as drugs, alcohol, carbon monoxide or pesticides. Unintentional deaths caused by accidental poisonings accounted for 7,066 deaths in 2021, an increase of 31.9% when compared with 2020. In particular, drug overdoses, which accounted for the vast majority (95.9%) of deaths attributed to accidental poisonings in 2021, rose by 32.9%.



While the rates of death attributed to accidental poisonings increased for both males and females in all age groups, the largest increases were observed among men. In 2021, males accounted for over 7 of every 10 deaths attributed to accidental poisoning.

Deaths due to an accidental fall increased by 6.1% from 2020 to 2021. A fatal fall can occur due to slipping, tripping or stumbling as a result of routine or sporting activities performed indoors or outdoors.

Falls represented more than two-thirds (68.3%) of all accidental deaths in Canadians aged 65 years and older in 2021. In contrast, among those under the age of 65, accidental poisonings were the top accidental cause of death, accounting for 69.5% of all such deaths.

COVID-19 the fourth leading cause of death in Canada in 2021

Despite a greater understanding of the evolution of the COVID-19 virus, strengthened public health regulations and the introduction of vaccines across Canada, COVID-19 continued to significantly impact the lives of Canadians in 2021. The number of deaths attributed to the virus decreased from 16,313 in 2020 to 14,466 in 2021, making COVID-19 the fourth leading cause of death that year.

Females accounted for the entire decline in COVID-19 deaths. There were 2,056 fewer female deaths in 2021 than in 2020, while male deaths due to COVID-19 increased from 7,889 in 2020 to 8,098 in 2021.

The increase in COVID-19 deaths was felt by younger Canadians

In the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the direct consequences of the disease were felt disproportionately by older Canadians, with those under the age of 65 accounting for 968 (5.9%) of all COVID-19 deaths. In 2021, the number of COVID-19 deaths among those under the age of 65 more than doubled to 2,602. Males accounted for the majority (65.8%) of the increase.

Completing the top-10 leading causes of death in Canada in 2021 were cerebrovascular diseases (stroke; 13,491 deaths), chronic lower respiratory diseases (11,018), diabetes mellitus (7,472), Alzheimer's disease (5,471), chronic liver disease and cirrhosis (4,617), and influenza and pneumonia (4,115). Of these, only chronic liver disease and cirrhosis saw an increase in the number of deaths compared with 2020, when there were 4,197 deaths attributed to disease of the liver. Increases in the rate of mortality due to chronic liver disease and cirrhosis were observed for males and females of all ages.

Note to readers

A preliminary dataset from the Canadian Vital Statistics Death Database, covering the 2021 reference year, was released today. Revisions were also made to the data covering the 2018, 2019 and 2020 reference years.

The data released today are preliminary, as they do not include information on deaths having occurred in Yukon. Furthermore, deaths investigated by coroners or medical examiners, such as suicides, accidents and homicides, often require lengthy investigation. Consequently, information on the causes of death, particularly among younger Canadians, whose deaths are more likely to result in an investigation, typically requires more time before it is reported to Statistics Canada.

The tabulation of the causes of death is based on the underlying causes of death, which is defined by the World Health Organization as the disease or injury that initiated the train of events leading directly to death, or as the circumstances of the accident or violence that produced the fatal injury. The underlying cause of death is selected from the causes and conditions listed on the medical certificate of cause of death completed by a medical professional, medical examiner or coroner.

Life expectancy represents the average number of years lived by a hypothetical cohort exposed at each age to the mortality conditions observed during a given year or period.

Available tables: [13-10-0114-01](#), [13-10-0140-01](#) to [13-10-0156-01](#) , [13-10-0391-01](#), [13-10-0392-01](#), [13-10-0394-01](#), [13-10-0395-01](#), [13-10-0707-01](#) to [13-10-0716-01](#) , [13-10-0756-01](#), [13-10-0776-01](#), [13-10-0780-01](#), [13-10-0782-01](#), [13-10-0800-01](#), [13-10-0801-01](#) and [13-10-0837-01](#).

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

The publication *Life Tables, Canada, Provinces and Territories* ([84-537-X](#)) is now available.

The publication *Methods for Constructing Life Tables for Canada, Provinces and Territories* ([84-538-X](#)) is also available.

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; infostats@statcan.gc.ca) or Media Relations (statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca).