

# Deaths, 2023

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There were 326,571 total deaths in Canada in 2023, a 2.4% decrease from 2022. This trend was reflected in most provinces and territories. New preliminary information on 2023 deaths is available today from the Canadian Vital Statistics - Death database.

## Life expectancy increases for the first time in three years, but it remains below pre-pandemic levels

After three years of consecutive decline, life expectancy at birth in Canada increased from 81.3 years in 2022 to 81.7 years in 2023, representing a gain of 0.4 years. However, it was 0.5 years below the pre-COVID-19 pandemic level of 2019 (82.2 years). The increase was more pronounced among males (+0.5 years to a life expectancy of 79.5 years) than females (+0.4 years to a life expectancy of 83.9 years). In 2023, life expectancy at age 65 also increased by 0.5 years among males, reaching 19.6 years, and it increased by 0.3 years to 22.2 years among females. Comparable gains were observed across other OECD countries, reflecting a general rebound in life expectancy from 2020 to 2023.

Among the provinces, significant increases in life expectancy at birth were observed in Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, Alberta, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick in 2023.

Life expectancy increases when there are fewer deaths in general, when deaths occur predominantly at older ages, or a combination of both. From 2022 to 2023, gains in life expectancy at birth were driven by declining mortality rates among adults aged 50 years and older.

## Lowest number of COVID-19 deaths since the start of the pandemic

COVID-19 deaths decreased by 60%, from 19,716 deaths in 2022 to 7,955 deaths in 2023. In comparison, the number of COVID-19 deaths was 15,890 in 2020 and 14,466 in 2021. Nevertheless, COVID-19 continued to have a disproportionate impact on older individuals in 2023. About 7 in 10 COVID-19 deaths (69%) were among people aged 80 years and older, and 1 in 4 were among 65- to 79-year-olds.

## Cancer was the leading cause of death among Canadians in 2023

[Overall cancer incidence rates have been declining since 2011 for males and since 2012 for females](#), but the total number of new cancer cases and deaths continues to increase each year due to the growing and aging population. Thus, cancer remained the leading cause of death among Canadians in 2023. There were 84,629 cancer-related deaths, representing just over one in four deaths (25.9%).

By cancer site, lung and bronchus cancer was responsible for the largest number of cancer-related deaths in 2023, accounting for 22% of cancer deaths among males and 24% of cancer deaths among females. Among females, breast cancer accounted for 13% of cancer deaths, followed by pancreatic cancer (7%), colon cancer (7%) and ovarian cancer (5%). Among males, lung and bronchus cancer was followed by prostate (11%), pancreatic (7%), colon (7%) and liver and intrahepatic bile duct (5%) cancers.

The cancer site responsible for the greatest number of cancer deaths varied by age group, as well. Among male and female children aged 1 to 14 years, brain cancer was responsible for 41% of cancer deaths in 2023, while it was bone and cartilage (of unspecified sites) cancer among 15- to 24-year-olds (20%). Among people aged 25 to 44 years, eight cancers were responsible for more than half of all cancer deaths in males (Table 1), compared with four cancers being responsible for half of all cancer deaths among females (Table 2). Within this age group, breast cancer was responsible for 27% of cancer deaths among females, while brain cancer (13%) was the most common cause of cancer death among males. In the age group of 45- to 64-year-olds, lung and bronchus cancer was responsible for 22% of cancer deaths among both males and females. Among people aged 65 years and older, lung and bronchus cancer was responsible for 23% of cancer deaths among males and 25% of cancer deaths among females.



**Table 1**  
**Top cancer sites of cancer deaths among 25- to 44-year-old males, Canada, 2023**

	number of deaths	%
Brain	92	13
Bronchus and lung	52	7
Colon	75	11
Other connective and soft tissue	31	4
Pancreas	28	4
Rectosigmoid junction	26	4
Skin	26	4
Stomach	37	5
Other cancers	338	48

Source(s): Canadian Vital Statistics - Death database (3233).

**Table 2**  
**Top cancer sites of cancer deaths among 25- to 44-year-old females, Canada, 2023**

	number of deaths	%
Brain	67	8
Breast	223	27
Cervix uteri	58	7
Colon	63	8
Other cancers	405	50

Source(s): Canadian Vital Statistics - Death database (3233).

In 2023, the other causes of death that made up the top 10 leading causes of death included heart disease, accidents (unintentional injuries), cerebrovascular diseases, chronic lower respiratory disease, COVID-19, diabetes mellitus, influenza and pneumonia, Alzheimer's disease, and chronic liver disease and cirrhosis. However, the leading causes of death varied by age group. Among people aged 1 to 14 years, accidents, cancers as well as congenital malformations, deformation and chromosomal abnormalities were the top three leading causes of death. Among adolescents and young adults (aged 15 to 24 years) and adults aged 25 to 44 years, accidents, cancers and suicides were the leading three causes. Among people aged 45 to 64 years, cancers were the leading cause of death, followed by heart disease and accidents (unintentional injuries). In the oldest age group (65 years and older), cancer, heart disease and cerebrovascular diseases made up the top three causes.

### Highest number of accidental drug poisoning deaths ever recorded

In 2023, there were 7,162 accidental drug poisoning deaths; the highest number of deaths ever recorded. The total number of these deaths in 2023 surpassed the previously reported high levels observed during the pandemic (6,774 in 2021 and 5,645 in 2022). Among the provinces and territories, British Columbia (40.3 deaths per 100,000 population), Alberta (26.1) and Saskatchewan (22.9) had the highest age-standardized mortality rates for accidental drug poisoning. At the national level, nearly three in four deaths (73%) were among males. Among males who died of an accidental drug poisoning, nearly 9 in 10 of them were aged 25 to 64 years: 21% were aged 25 to 34 years, 27% were aged 35 to 44 years, 23% were aged 45 to 54 years and 18% were aged 55 to 64 years. The other age groups—that is, males younger than 15 years (5%), those aged 65 to 74 years (6%) and those aged 75 years and older (1%)—made up the remaining shares.

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## Note to readers

A preliminary dataset from the Canadian Vital Statistics - Death database, covering the 2023 reference year, was released today. The dashboard Visualizing mortality in Canada: Rates and counts by age group for select causes of death has been updated with 2023 deaths. Data for 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 deaths that occurred in Yukon are not available. To avoid confusion, data for deaths of residents of Yukon that occurred in other provinces and territories were excluded. The data released today are preliminary, as deaths investigated by coroners or medical examiners, such as suicides, accidents and homicides, often require lengthy investigation. Consequently, information on these causes of death, particularly among younger Canadians, whose deaths are more likely to result in an investigation, typically requires more time before being reported to Statistics Canada.

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. Note that data for Yukon in 2023 were included in the estimation of life expectancy at the Canada-level, despite being excluded from national estimates when data were not available (2017 to 2022). The inclusion of Yukon had a minimal impact on estimates for Canada in 2023. Death counts for Nova Scotia in 2023 are known to be underestimated due to a National Routing System outage that affected the transmission of death records for a portion of the year. Observed death counts were adjusted for missing records prior to being used in the estimation of life expectancy. The adjustment is based on a combination of the historical distribution of deaths (2022) and the distribution of deaths across months in 2023 known to have complete death data.

The tabulation of the causes of death is based on the underlying cause of death, which is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) 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, which is completed by a medical professional, medical examiner or coroner.

The list of ranking leading causes of death that is used here is based on the list that was developed and that is being used by the National Center for Health Statistics of the United States in their annual report on leading causes of death.

Accidental drug poisoning deaths included deaths from accidental poisoning by and exposure to nonopioid analgesics, antipyretics and antirheumatics (International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, Tenth Revision, [ICD-10] code: X40); accidental poisoning by and exposure to antiepileptic, sedative-hypnotic, antiparkinsonism and psychotropic drugs, not elsewhere classified (X41); accidental poisoning by and exposure to narcotics and psychodysleptics [hallucinogens], not elsewhere classified (X42); accidental poisoning by and exposure to other drugs acting on the autonomic nervous system (X43); and accidental poisoning by and exposure to other and unspecified drugs, medicaments and biological substances (X44).

The age-standardized mortality rate shows the number of deaths per 100,000 population that would have occurred in each area if the age structure of the population of that area was the same as the age structure of a specified standard population. The age-standardized mortality rates used the 2011 population.

The cause of death category "ill-defined and unspecified causes of mortality" is used when the underlying cause of death is undetermined or unknown. Deaths are assigned to this category when: the investigation failed to conclusively establish a specific cause of death—i.e., the medical certificate of cause of death indicates "undetermined," or the causes of death indicated on the medical certificate of cause of death lack detail, for example, cardiac arrest—or the death is pending investigation by a coroner or medical examiner (e.g., deaths from accidents, suicides and homicides). Over time, as the causes of death become known and are reported to Statistics Canada, deaths in this category are recategorized accordingly and the number of deaths attributed to ill-defined and unspecified causes of mortality decreases. Before 2023, the ICD-10 code R99 included deaths due to all these causes. In 2023, Statistics Canada added these subcategories: R99.1, pending investigation; R99.2, information on cause of death not yet received; R99.9, other ill-defined and unspecified causes of mortality. These subcategories were derived to provide additional granularity to this code and an indication of the number of records whose R99 codes are likely to change over the following one or two years.

There is no cause-of-death code within ICD-10 to identify deaths that occur under Canada's medical assistance in dying (MAID) provision. Rather, these deaths are coded to the health condition that led the decedents to avail themselves of MAID—in accordance with WHO's international standards and practices. These consistent standards are used to code deaths according to their underlying health conditions to monitor trends in population health and inform health policy both within Canada and internationally.

Sex assigned at birth based on a person's reproductive system and other physical characteristics is used to disaggregate estimates for males and females.

Cancer site refers to the part of the body where the cancer originated.

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 dashboard "[Visualizing mortality in Canada: Rates and counts by age group for select causes of death](#)" has been updated with 2023 deaths.

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](mailto:infostats@statcan.gc.ca)) or Media Relations ([statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca](mailto:statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca)).