



## Deaths



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# Deaths

## Abstract

Death statistics measure the number of deaths registered in New Zealand.

Stats NZ is the principal agency responsible for processing and publishing vital statistics in New Zealand, including death statistics. It seeks to provide information that meets the legal, public policy and community requirements for up-to date official statistics at the local, regional and national level.

## Purpose

Under the provisions of the Births, Deaths, Marriages, and Relationships Registration Act 1995, every death occurring in New Zealand must be registered.

Death statistics provide local authorities, health authorities, and research institutions with information needed to plan future and current social services. Within Stats NZ, births and deaths data are used to calculate population estimates, population projections and life tables.

## Population

### Deaths

Deaths

All deaths in New Zealand

## Deaths

### Methodology

Under the provisions of the Births, Deaths, Marriages, and Relationships Registration Act 1995, every death occurring in New Zealand must be registered.

A 'Notification of Death for Registration' form (BDM28) must be completed (generally by the funeral director) and forwarded to the registrars at Births, Deaths, and Marriages (a division of the Department of Internal Affairs) within three working days after the disposal of the body concerned.

Stats NZ receives a monthly electronic file of registered deaths from Births, Deaths, and Marriages which includes some but not all of the information collected on the BDM28. Stats NZ has the responsibility for processing and publishing death statistics derived from the death registrations. Statistics New Zealand does not code all the information supplied by Internal Affairs.

Death data are published quarterly and unless otherwise stated refer to deaths by date of registration not the date of death.

#### **Requirements from the Births, Deaths, Marriages, and Relationships Registration Act 1995**

##### **(i) Manner of Notification of Death (Section 47)**

- (1) A person notifying a Registrar of a death shall do so –
  - (a) By completing and signing the prescribed form and giving, sending, or posting it to the Registrar; or
  - (b) By sending the prescribed information relating to the death to the Registrar by an electronic means approved by the Registrar-General.
- (2) Subject to subsection (3) of this section, a person who completes and signs the prescribed form and posts it to the Registrar shall be deemed to do so at the time the form would be received by the Registrar in the normal course of post.
- (3) Where –
  - (a) Any person has notified a Registrar of a death by completing and signing the prescribed form and sending or posting it to a Registrar; but
  - (b) It has not arrived or has been lost or destroyed, –
 a Registrar may authorise the person, or any other person required by any of sections 42 to 45 of this Act to notify a Registrar of

the death, to do so as if the form has never been sent or posted; and in that case the person concerned may do so.

**(ii) Time Within Which Death to be Notified (Section 48)**

- (1) A person required by section (42)1 of this Act to notify a death shall do so within 3 working days after the disposal of the body concerned.
- (2) A coroner required by section 44 of this Act to notify a death shall do so within 3 working days of the completion of the inquest concerned.
- (3) If the Register-General is satisfied that –
  - (a) Any death in New Zealand has not previously been registered; or
  - (b) The death of a person ordinarily resident in New Zealand occurred in a place outside New Zealand where...
    - (i) There was no system for recording information relating to deaths; or
    - (ii) The system for recording information relating to deaths did not apply to the person, –
 the death may be notified at any time; but (without limiting the generality of section 82 of this Act) the Register-General may decline to allow information relating to it to be recorded if not satisfied that its registration is appropriate.

## Collection Events

### 1900 -

#### Intended Frequency

Quarterly

#### Significant events impacting this study series

##### Important Dates Relating to Death Statistics

1844 - Vital Statistics first published as part of "Statistics of New Zealand" (blue book).

1847 - Registration Ordinance Act.

This made provision for a record of births and deaths being kept by the state.

1848 - Non-compulsory registration of births and deaths introduced. Notification of births and deaths was compulsory.

1858 - The Registration Act.

This act provided for compulsory registration of births, deaths and marriages.

1859 - Compulsory registration of births, deaths and marriages introduced.

1875 - The Registration of Births and Deaths Act.

This act required further information regarding births and deaths to be provided at the time of registration.

1893 - New Zealand's Official Yearbook first published in its present form.

1910 - Collection of Vital Statistics entrusted to the Government Statistician (formerly the responsibility of the Registrar General).

1912 - Births and Deaths Registration Amendment Act.

Established regulations for the registration of Māori births and deaths and also made provision for the registration of stillbirths.

1913 - Compulsory registration of Māori births and deaths established. Also compulsory registration of stillbirths established.

1914 - Monthly Abstract of Statistics first published.

1921 - Vital Statistics report first published. Previously vital statistics were published in the blue book.

1924 - Births and Deaths Registration Act.

Consolidated and revised previous legislation regarding the registration of births and deaths.

1928 - New Zealand Pocket Digest of Statistics first published.

1949 - Medical Statistics Branch of National Health Institute was established. It was made responsible for compilation and analysis of mortality and morbidity statistics.

1951 - The Births and Deaths Registration Act.

This act set down the regulations regarding birth and death registration.

1961 - The Births and Deaths Registration Amendment Act.

This act repealed the definitions of a Māori with respect to birth and death registration.

1962 - Abolition of Māori births and deaths registers. The format of the Vital Statistics report was changed. All tables were now compiled for 'Total Population' and 'Māori Population' rather than 'Non-Māori Population' and 'Māori Population'.

1984 - Review Committee on Ethnic Statistics initiated by Government Statistician.

1986 - Last year of coding burials versus cremation from death form. Nobody required the information except perhaps the funeral directors.

1987 - Last year of publication of annual volume on vital statistics, some information incorporated into Demographic Trends.

1988 - The Review Committee on Ethnic Statistics produced a report which had significant implications for the collection of birth and death registration information.

1993 - Minor changes to the death registration form. Removal of the questions that were gender specific and replacement with

gender neutral questions. Removal of "spinster". (According to a letter from Brian Clarke, the Registrar General, changes authorised in March 1993, e.g. removal of spinster). Major effect on analysis of deaths by marital status.

1993 - Department of Justice requested that the category for recording whether a deceased person was buried or cremated be removed from death registration form (RG28). Statistics confirmed that it was no longer necessary.

1994 - The addition of a question on marital status at the time of death. This was as a result of problems caused by the removal of the term 'spinster' in 1993.

1995 - Births, Deaths, Marriages, and Relationship Act 1995.

Introduced new birth and death registration forms. A major change was the introduction of new ethnicity and Māori descent questions (consistent with those used in the 1996 Census).

1995 - As part of government restructuring, the public registries group of Department of Justice was split up from October 1st. Internal Affairs was given responsibility for Births, Deaths and Marriages.

1996 - Following the 1996 Census of Population and Dwellings, Stats NZ changed its standard statistical concept for deriving population estimates and projections from the de facto population to the resident population.

1998 - Ministry of Health ceased requiring vitals data from Stats NZ. As a result some information was no longer coded (e.g. locality of death, deceased's occupation).

1998 - Internal Affairs computerised the vitals collection system from 1 January. Data now provided electronically to Stats NZ and supply of birth, death and marriage registration forms phased out. Data from 1 July processed by Stats NZ using new LAN-based system.

2005 - The March quarter HOTP was last release containing provisional data. From June quarter final data only will be published.

From April 2005 the marital status question on the death registration form (BDM28) was changed to "relationship status at time of death". This means that de facto relationships and civil unions are now recorded. The ethnicity question was changed to that asked in the 2001 Census.

2006 - From 1 January 2006 ethnicity will be coded according to the 2005 ethnicity classification.

2006 - Banks Peninsula District amalgamated with Christchurch City on 6 March 2006. Births and deaths registered to people resident in the Banks Peninsula District prior to 6 March 2006 are included with the Christchurch City figures.

2008 - The number of infant deaths registered in the March 2008 quarter is higher than expected due to changes in the procedures used by the Department of Internal Affairs. About 30 infant deaths registered in the March 2008 quarter occurred between 2004 and 2006.

2014 - In May and June 2014 the Department of Internal Affairs registered a significant number (51) of neonatal (infants under 4 weeks of age) deaths that had occurred in 2011 and 2012. Therefore neonatal and infant (children under 1 year of age) deaths for the June 2014 quarter are higher than other periods, and 2011 and 2012 figures are lower than they would have been if these deaths were registered at the time they occurred.

For further information see "Usage and limitations of the data."

2016 - Births and deaths data from the March 2016 year onwards has been randomly rounded to protect confidentiality. Individual figures may not add up to totals, and values for the same data may vary in different tables. Median ages from the March 2016 year data have been recalculated using randomly rounded data. We are committed to ensuring confidentiality by not releasing information that could identify individuals. Random rounding is used to disguise small counts, but all cells in a table are randomly rounded. Counts that are already a multiple of three are left unchanged. Those not a multiple of three are rounded to one of the two nearest multiples. For example, a one will be rounded to either a zero or a three. Each value in the table is rounded independently. This means counts may not sum to totals, but ensures that published totals are within two of the original number.

## Usage and limitations of the data

### Ethnicity

#### Prior to September 1995

- Prior to September 1995, the death registration form collected information on the degree of Māori or Pacific Island blood and the tribe or island of the deceased's mother and father. If the parents were not of Māori or Pacific Island descent no ethnic details were required. For statistical purposes this residual group was generally categorised as 'non-Māori', 'non-Pacific Island'. Because next of kin were required to give details of the deceased's parents this question often proved difficult to answer and in many instances went unanswered.

- Deaths were classified as NZ Māori, Pacific Islander or non-NZ Māori/non Pacific Islander according to the combined ethnic fractions of the parents of the deceased. (Registration of deaths required information on the degree (fraction) of Māori or Pacific Island blood of the deceased's mother and father and their tribe.)

- For example. ½ Māori mother + Full Māori father = Māori (½ or more Māori), while ½ Māori mother + non-Māori father = non Māori (less than ½ Māori)

The question produced two types of responses: Māori or Pacific Island people (defined as those who had half or more Māori or Pacific Island blood) and non-Māori and non-Pacific Island people. It was recognised as limiting as there was no way of separately identifying other ethnic groups (eg Asian, European). Also, from 1986 (when the census ethnic question embraced the concept of self-identification), the inconsistencies between the scope of the ethnic vitals question and the ethnic census question became marked. The two data sets (registration-based vital events and census population) were based on different concepts and this added to the complexities of accurately measuring ethnic differentials in mortality.

#### From September 1995

- Changes to the Births, Deaths, Marriages and Relationships Act and the introduction of a new death registration form in September 1995 marked a major milestone in ethnic statistics. The new death registration form included an ethnic question consistent with the concept of ethnic self-identification. In addition a question is asked regarding whether the deceased was descended from a New Zealand Māori.

Initially, the ethnic question on the death registration form was the same as that asked in the 1996 Census of Population and Dwellings. It asked the respondent to tick as many circles as needed to show which ethnic group the deceased belonged to. During 2005, the ethnic question was changed on the death registration form to be consistent with that in the 2001 Census of Population and Dwellings. It asked the respondent to tick the box or boxes which applied to the deceased.

Before June 1998, up to three ethnic groups were captured; after that date all responses have been captured.

The ethnic question based on self-identification resulted in:

- A large increase in the number of deceased being identified by respondents as belonging to one, or both, of the Māori and Pacific ethnic groups.
- A much greater range of ethnic groups being identified by respondents for the deceased. Where previously the non-Māori, non-Pacific Island category was large and ambiguous, it is now possible to identify specific ethnic groups, such as Chinese, Malaysian or South African, within this broad group.
- Multiple ethnic responses being generated as a result of respondents having the opportunity to select more than one ethnic group.
- The ability to monitor the level of non-response to the ethnic question.

The implications of these results are:

- It is now possible to generate ethnic-specific rates of mortality as well as to calculate population estimates and projections for a wider range of ethnic groups.
- It will be possible to more accurately gauge the specific needs of ethnic groups and, for the first time, detail on smaller ethnic minorities will be available.

These changes are an important outcome of the ongoing evaluation of statistical concepts and definitions designed to introduce consistency to ethnic questions and classifications across a range of statistical surveys.

#### From January 2006

- From 1 January 2006 ethnicity will be coded according to the 2005 ethnicity classification. The new classification consists of six broad ethnic groups (European, Māori, Pacific, Asian, MELAA (Middle Eastern, Latin American and African) and Other) compared with five under the previous classification (European, Māori, Pacific, Asian and Other). In addition, a new ethnicity 'New Zealander' has been created within the Other group. Previously 'New Zealander' type responses (eg Kiwi) were coded to New Zealand European.

#### More about the history of death registration in New Zealand

- More information about the history of death registrations and their limitations can be found in Stats NZ's publication "A History of Survival in New Zealand: Cohort life table 1876–2004" and "Little Histories" published by the Department of Internal Affairs.

#### Neonatal and infant deaths

Under-registration of neonatal and infant deaths

- Births and deaths data published by Stats NZ is derived from registrations held by the Department of Internal Affairs (Births, deaths and marriages - BDM). Because there is a lag between the date of birth or death and the date of registration, we generally publish data by date of registration (not date of birth or death). The lag between the event and the registration tends to be relatively short for deaths but longer for births.

• In 2012, we reported a drop in infant death registrations, particularly neonatal deaths (infants under 4 weeks of age). However, the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the coronial office had not observed a significant drop. The MoH are able to compare death registrations with their National Minimum Data Set (NMDS)\*. MoH had observed an under-registration of neonatal deaths\*\* for a number of years but the under-registration in 2012 was much larger than preceding years. (The unregistered deaths are largely very low weight preterm births who die shortly after birth.) Since then the MoH and BDM have been working to identify and register deaths that had occurred in 2011 and 2012 but had not been registered at the time. BDM completed these registrations in May and June 2014. This has resulted in a proportionally significant increase in the number of neonatal deaths in the June quarter 2014 registration data compared with previous June quarters.

Neonatal deaths registered in the June 2014 quarter

- In the June 2014 quarter, 105 neonatal deaths were registered. That is significantly higher than the quarterly average (40) in the previous 5 years.
- Nearly one-half (51) of the neonatal deaths registered in the June 2014 quarter had occurred in 2011 and 2012 (15 and 36, respectively).

Impact on annual neonatal and infant mortality rates

- Infant mortality rates are calculated by dividing the number of deaths of children under 1 year of age by the number of live births (we use live births registered in New Zealand to mothers resident in NZ by date of registration) multiplied by 1,000.
- Neonatal mortality rates are calculated by dividing the number of deaths of infants under 4 weeks of age by the number of live births multiplied by 1,000.
- Neonatal and infant mortality rates for the June 2014 year show a significant increase. (Other periods that include the June 2014 quarter will show a similar pattern.)

Please refer to 'Infant Mortality Rate, 2004–14' in section 'Graphs' above.

- Rates for 2011 and 2012 are lower than they would have been if these deaths were registered at the time they occurred. It is also acknowledged that under-registration affects other years. The Ministry of Health have provisionally estimated this undercount at between 10 and 12 percent. To give some indication of the impact of these factors, we have included a graph of neonatal and infant mortality rates with the following adjustments;

- for 2004–10 and 2013 we increased registered neonatal deaths by 10 percent (registered neonatal deaths multiplied by 1.1)
- 2011 - registered neonatal deaths plus 15
- 2012 - registered neonatal deaths plus 36
- 2014 – registered neonatal deaths minus 51 then multiplied by 1.1
- no adjustment was made to the number of live births

These adjustments produce a relatively static neonatal rate and a small decline in the infant mortality rate over the last decade.

Please refer to 'Estimated Infant Mortality Rate, 2004–14' in section 'Graphs' above.

• The National Minimum Dataset (NMDS) is a national collection of public and private hospital discharge information, including coded clinical data for inpatients and day patients.

\*\* A small number of deaths at other ages are also under-registered but they do not make up a significant proportion of overall deaths. Because the number of neonatal is relatively small (about 180 per year) a change in the rate of under-registration can have a significant impact on neonatal and infant deaths rates.

#### Main users of the data

Stats NZ, Ministry of Health, Government Planners and Local Authority Planners, Health researchers, District Health Boards, Funeral Directors

#### Frequency

- Quarterly

## Related Materials

### Other

- [Deaths webpage](#)
- [A History of Survival in New Zealand](#)
- [Little Histories](#)

## Variables

## Concepts

### Deaths – concepts

Name	Description
Death	<p><b>Death</b></p> <p>The permanent disappearance of all evidence of life at any time after live birth has taken place (post-natal cessation of vital functions without capability of resuscitation). This definition therefore excludes foetal deaths.</p>
Foetal Death	<p><b>Foetal Death</b></p> <p>Death prior to the complete expulsion or extraction from its mother of a product of conception, irrespective of gestation, by either spontaneous abortion (miscarriage), induced abortion or stillbirth. Death is indicated by the fact that after such separation the foetus does not breathe or show any other evidence of life, such as beating of the heart, pulsation of the umbilical cord or definite movement of voluntary muscles.</p> <p>The three major categories of foetal death recommended by the World Health Organisation are:</p> <p>early foetal deaths at less than 20 completed weeks of gestation</p> <p>intermediate foetal deaths at 20 or more, but less than 28, weeks of gestation</p> <p>late foetal deaths at 28 weeks or more of gestation.</p>
Infant Death	<p><b>Infant Death</b></p> <p>The death of a child (who was born alive) before the age of one year. The infant mortality rate is the number of infant deaths per 1,000 live births.</p>
Mortality	<p><b>Mortality</b></p> <p>The death of individuals in a community.</p>

Neonatal Death	<p><b>Neonatal Death</b> The death of a child (who was born alive) before the age of 28 days. The neonatal mortality rate is the number of neonatal deaths per 1,000 live births.</p>
Perinatal Death	<p><b>Perinatal Death</b> These are stillbirths plus early neonatal deaths (infant deaths under 7 days of age). The perinatal mortality rate is the number of perinatal deaths per 1,000 births.</p>
Post-neonatal Death	<p><b>Post-neonatal Death</b> The death of a child (who was born alive) from age 28 days but before the age of one year. The post-neonatal mortality rate is the number of post-neonatal deaths per 1,000 live births.</p>
Widowed	<p><b>Widowed</b> A person who has not remarried following the death of his or her legal husband or wife.</p>
Registrar-General	<p><b>Registrar-General</b> A national birth, death and marriage registration service has been operating in New Zealand since the 1840s and is administered by the Registrar-General under the auspices of the Department of Internal Affairs. The Registrar-General is responsible for the compilation, maintenance and preservation of a national genealogical record and provision of a certificate service.</p>
Early Neonatal Death	<p><b>Early Neonatal Death</b> The death of a child (who was born alive) before the age of 7 days. The early neonatal mortality rate is the number of early neonatal deaths per 1,000 live births.</p>
Death Rate (Crude)	<p><b>Death Rate (Crude)</b> The number of deaths per 1,000 mean population.</p>
Major causes of death	<p><b>Major causes of death</b> Statistics on various major causes of deaths.</p>
Standardised Death Rate	<p><b>Standardised Death Rate</b> The overall death rate that would have prevailed in a standard population if it had experienced the age-specific (usually age-and-sex-specific) death rates of the population or area being studied.</p> <p>For example, the standardised death rates presented in the report New Zealand Life Tables 2005-07 indicate the number of deaths per 1,000 population for each ethnic group/area and each period, if each ethnic group/area had a standard population (the estimated resident population of New Zealand at 30 June 1996).</p>

Life Table	<p><b>Life Table</b></p> <p>Life tables are a basic demographic tool for analysing mortality and survival. They are a tabular numerical representation of death and survivorship rates at each age of life.</p> <p>The life tables are based on death rates during a specific period, and such tables are called period, current, or cross-sectional life tables. Period life tables are based on the age-specific death rates of the population during a specific period of time. Life expectancy is a summary measure of those age-specific death rates, but it is a hypothetical life expectancy assuming people experience the age-specific death rates of that period over their lifetime.</p> <p>In contrast, cohort or generation life tables are based on the age-specific death rates of people over their lifetime. These tables give the actual life expectancy of a particular cohort (eg all people born in the year 1900), although they require data over many years, theoretically until the death of the last survivor.</p> <p>Every five years, Statistics NZ produces complete life tables using average mortality rates for three successive years centred on a census year. A complete life table presents functions for each single-year of age. These are currently available for the total, Māori, and non-Māori populations from 1950–52.</p> <p>In between complete life tables, Statistics NZ produces abridged life tables using mortality rates for three successive years centred on a non-census year. These abridged life tables are an interim indication of mortality and survival trends of the total population until complete period life tables are derived. An abridged life table presents functions for five-year age groups rather than by single-year of age, although age 0 and 1–4 years are identified separately.</p> <p>In 2006, Statistics NZ released for the total population for the first time. These track the mortality and survival trends of people born in each year from 1876, and are updated and extended annually.</p> <p>Every five years, Statistics NZ also produces for subnational areas using average mortality rates for three successive years centred on a census year. They are available for all 16 regions and most territorial authority areas (where death and population numbers are sufficient to construct reliable life tables). The latest subnational abridged period life tables are for 2005–07. Summary results for 1990–92 to 2005–07 are published while more detailed results are available on request. The 2012–14 life tables, using population estimates based on the 2013 Census, are scheduled for release in 2015.</p>
Life Expectancy	<p><b>Life Expectancy</b></p> <p>The average length of life remaining at a given age.</p> <p>In a period life table, it is the average length of life from a given age, assuming people experience the age-specific mortality rates of a given period from that given age onwards.</p> <p>In a cohort life table, it is the average length of life from a given age, of people born in a given period, based on the mortality rates actually experienced by them from that given age onwards.</p>
Relationship Status (Deaths)	<p><b>Relationship Status (Deaths)</b></p> <p>The relationship status of the deceased at the time of death. The categories include; married or civil union, de facto, deceased partner (married, civil union, or de facto), divorced (marriage or civil union), permanently separated (marriage or civil union), permanently ended (de facto), and never partnered (married, civil union, or de facto)</p>
Vital Statistics	<p><b>Vital Statistics</b></p> <p>Statistics of events such as births, deaths and marriages which influence the numbers of a population.</p>
Ethnicity	<p><b>Ethnicity</b></p> <p>Ethnicity is person's present day ethnic affiliation, i.e., the ethnic group/s that they identify with or feel they belong to. It is a measure of cultural affiliation. Ethnicity is different from ethnic origin which is a person's historical relationship to an ethnic group. It is different from race which is a biological indicator and an ascribed attribute. It is also different from ancestry which is a biological and historical concept referring to a person's blood descent. Ethnicity is also different from nationality which is a person's legal status as a citizen of a particular country.</p>

European or Other (including New Zealander) Ethnicity	<p><b>European or Other (including New Zealander) Ethnicity</b>          People who identify with a European ethnicity (eg New Zealand European, English, Dutch) or Other ethnicity (eg New Zealander), with or without other ethnicities.          Because ethnicity is self-perceived, people can identify with a European ethnicity even though they are not descended from a European ancestor. Conversely, people may choose to not identify with a European ethnicity even though they are descended from a European ancestor.</p> <p>The 'European' and 'Other Ethnicity' ethnic groups are defined in Level One of the Standard Classification of Ethnicity 2005. The 'European or Other (including New Zealander)' group includes people who belong to the 'European' or 'Other Ethnicity' groups. If a person belongs to both the 'European' and 'Other Ethnicity' groups, they are only counted once. The use of a 'European or Other' grouping reflects that sometimes sufficient data can be derived for the combined ethnic grouping, but not for the separate ethnic groups (as in the case of ethnic population projections). This approach is consistent with Guidelines for Using Ethnicity Data: 2006 Census.</p>
Māori Ethnicity	<p><b>Māori Ethnicity</b>          Māori ethnic population is the population who identify themselves with the Māori ethnicity with or without other ethnicities.</p> <p>Because ethnicity is self-perceived, people can identify with Māori ethnicity even though they are not descended from a Māori ancestor. Conversely, people may choose to not identify with Māori ethnicity even though they are descended from a Māori ancestor. It is a measure of cultural affiliation (in contrast to race, ancestry, nationality, or citizenship).</p>
Occupation	<p><b>Occupation</b>          Refers to main job held by individual. Persons should state a specific occupation for their main job. Persons should describe tasks or duties they spend most of their time on. (Census definition 2006)</p>
Pacific Peoples	<p><b>Pacific Peoples</b>          People who identify with a Pacific ethnicity (eg Samoan, Tongan, Fijian) with or without other ethnicities.</p> <p>Because ethnicity is self-perceived, people can identify with a Pacific ethnicity even though they are not descended from a Pacific ancestor. Conversely, people may choose to not identify with a Pacific ethnicity even though they are descended from a Pacific ancestor. Ethnicity is not the same as birthplace.</p>