

Drug-related deaths in Scotland reach record high

December 15 2020

Drug-related deaths in Scotland, regularly the worst country in Europe for fatalities from substance abuse, have hit a record high, according to government figures released on Tuesday.

Statistics from National Records Scotland show there were 1,264 [drug](#)-related deaths in the country last year, an increase of six percent since 2018.

The numbers were released following a six-month delay because of a backlog in processing [death](#) statistics during the coronavirus pandemic.

Despite reaching their highest recorded levels, the increase in drug deaths was slower than the previous year. The figure leapt up by a dramatic 27 percent between 2017 and 2018.

Joe Fitzpatrick, public health minister in the devolved Scottish [government](#), said each death was a "tragedy" and admitted the fatalities were caused by a "longstanding and complex set of challenges".

"There is no shortcut that will suddenly solve this. There is, however, action that we are taking right now that will have an impact more immediately," he added.

The Scottish government has called the high rate of deaths from drugs a public health emergency, as the toll is more than three times that in the UK as a whole.

A September report from the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction gave Scotland by far the highest recorded rate of drugs use in Europe.

Its figure was far in excess of Sweden, which came in second.

The 2019 statistics for Scotland showed an increase in deaths involving morphine and heroin: 645 deaths from the two substances represented just over half the total for the year.

The report also showed 94 percent of [drug-related deaths](#) were caused by more than one substance.

Benzodiazepines, a class of drugs acting as minor tranquilizers, either sold on the street or from prescriptions, were involved in more than two-thirds of deaths.

The largest number of deaths from drugs were recorded in Glasgow, Scotland's most populous city, and the surrounding area.

The Scottish government has invested £95.3 million (\$126 million, 104 million euros) this year to tackle the problem of alcohol and drug use and has established the Drug Deaths Taskforce to address the rising death tolls.

Professor Catriona Matheson, the chair of the taskforce, said the 2019 rise added "urgency to our mission".

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