

CRUK data brief

Cancer mortality in the UK, 2023

November 2025

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About this document

Reference

This report should be referred to as follows:

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About Cancer Research UK

We're the world's leading cancer charity dedicated to saving and improving lives through research. We fund research into the prevention, detection and treatment of more than 200 types of cancer through the work of over 4,000 scientists, doctors and nurses. In the last 50 years, we've helped double cancer survival in the UK and our research has played a role in more than half of the world's essential cancer drugs. Our vision is a world where everybody lives longer, better lives, free from the fear of cancer.



Cancer Research UK is a registered charity England and Wales (1089464), Scotland (SC041666), the Isle of Man (1103) and Jersey (247).

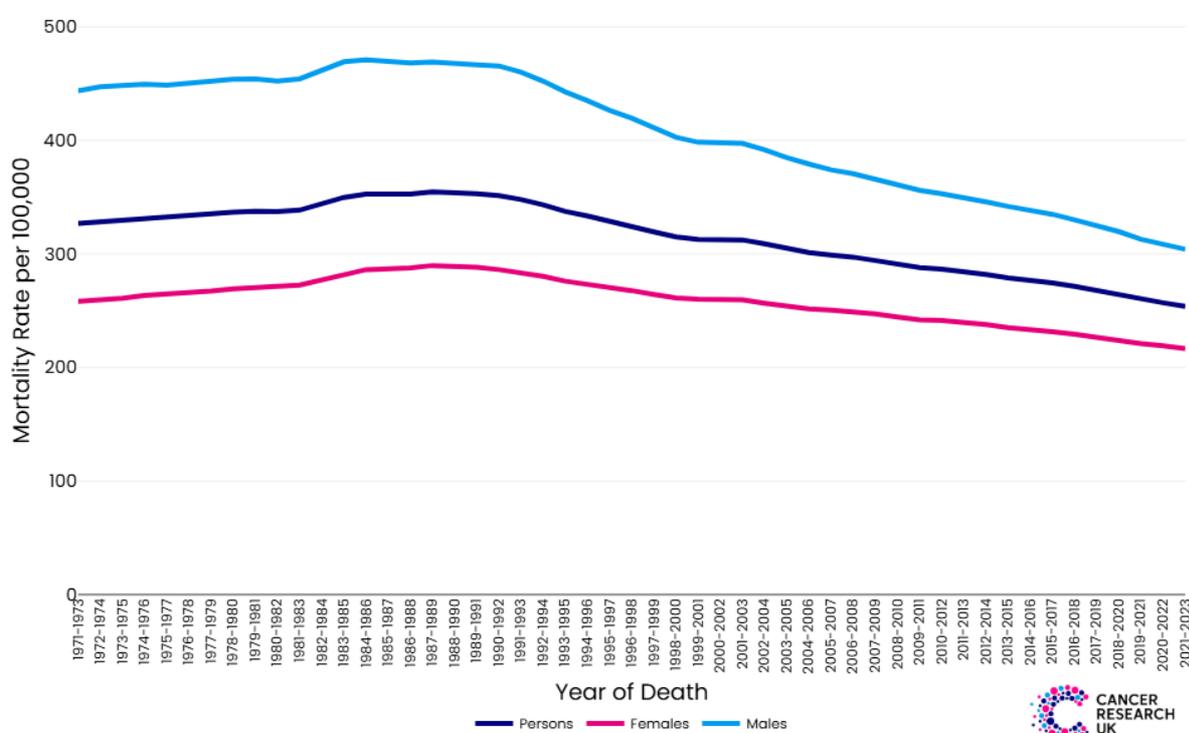
Key insights

- There are more than 168,000 cancer deaths in the UK every year (2021-23). In females there are around 78,800 cancer deaths each year, and in males there are around 89,700 deaths each year.
- Almost three-fifths (56%) of all cancer deaths in the UK are in people aged 75 and over, and the highest mortality rates are in people aged 90+ (2021-23).
- Cancer remains the leading cause of death in the UK, accounting for 26% of all deaths in 2023.
- Over the past 50 years, UK cancer mortality rates have fallen by more than a fifth (22%) – from 326.8 deaths per 100,000 people in 1971-73 to 253.8 per 100,000 people in 2021-23. Over the last decade alone, rates have fallen by around a tenth (11%).
- However, despite this decline in the rate of cancer deaths, the number of deaths due to cancer has increased to a record high of around 170,000 in 2023. This is largely due to the growing and aging UK population, and the fact that cancer is more frequently diagnosed in older people.
- Lung, bowel, prostate, and breast cancers accounted for more than 4 in 10 (44%) cancer deaths in 2021-23, with lung cancer alone accounting for 1 in 5 (20%) cancer deaths.
- Please find our 2021-23 UK cancer mortality statistics on our [Cancer Statistics Data Hub](#)

All cancers combined

Overall, cancer mortality rates have fallen by 11% in the UK over the last decade (Figure 1). Rates in females are significantly lower than those in males and have decreased by 10%, and rates in males have decreased by 13%. Despite the gap in cancer mortality rates between males and females narrowing, males continue to have more deaths from cancer than females with 89,700 deaths in the UK each year compared with 78,800 in females (2021-23).

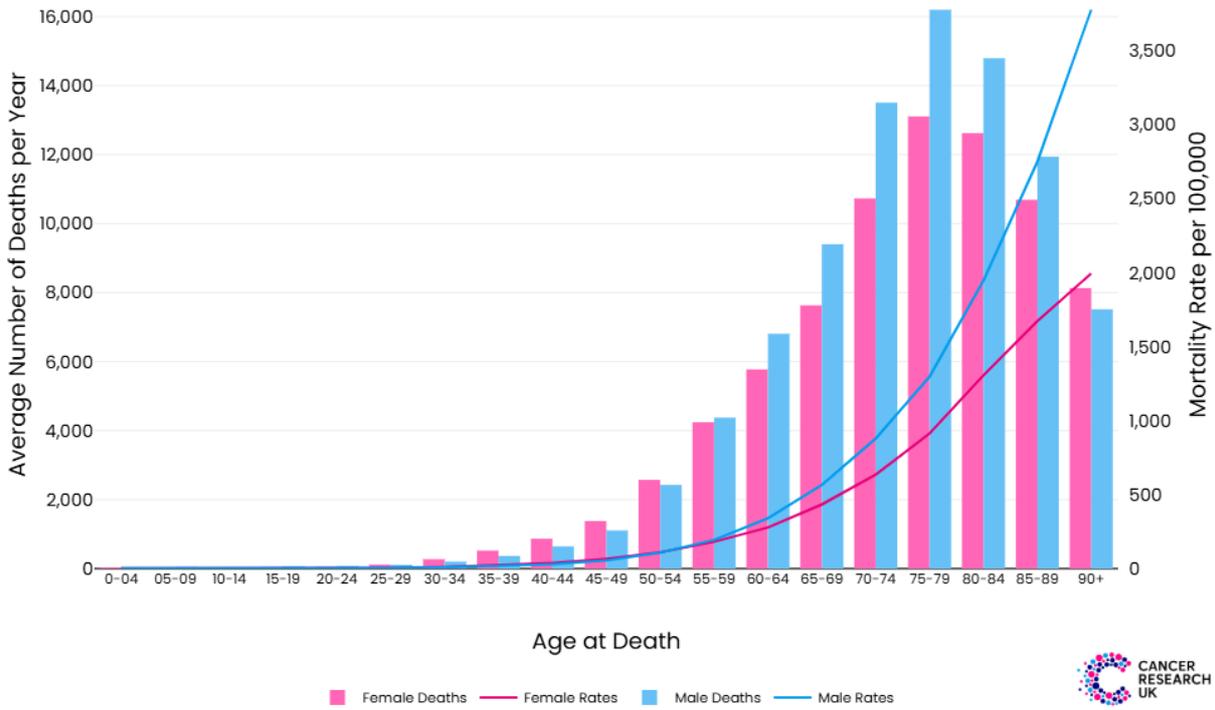
Figure 1: All Cancers (C00-C97), European Age-Standardised Mortality Rates per 100,000 Persons, UK, 1971-2023



The number and rate of cancer deaths increase with age. Each year almost three-fifths (56%) of all cancer deaths are in people aged 75 and over (2021-23) (Figure 2). The highest number of cancer deaths occur in the 75-79 age group for both males and females (around 16,200 and 13,100 deaths respectively, 2021-23), with numbers declining after this peak due to the size of the population decreasing. In contrast, mortality rates continue to rise with age, with the highest cancer mortality rates in the UK in people aged 90+.

For people aged 30-54 mortality rates are higher in females than in males, but from age 55 onwards rates are higher in males. These age differences in cancer mortality between males and females largely reflect differences in cancer incidence by age.

Figure 2: All Cancers (C00–C97) Average Number of Deaths per Year and Age-Specific Mortality Rates per 100,000 Females and Males, UK, 2021–2023



Cancers compared

Overall cancer mortality rates have declined in the UK over the last decade and this trend is reflected by most cancer sites (Table 1). The biggest decreases in mortality rates in the past decade are seen in stomach, mesothelioma, and lung cancer:

- Stomach cancer mortality rates have decreased by 34% (from 8.4 per 100k in 2011-13, to 5.6 per 100k in 2021-23)
- Mesothelioma mortality rates have decreased by 24% in Great Britain (from 4.5 per 100k in 2011-13, to 3.5 per 100k in 2021-23)
- Lung cancer mortality rates have decreased by 21% (from 62.8 per 100k in 2011-13, to 49.8 per 100k in 2021-23)

However, some other cancer sites have seen increases in mortality rate over the same period, for example:

- Liver cancer mortality rates have risen by 19% (from 7.9 per 100k in 2011-13, to 9.5 per 100k in 2021-23)
- Head and neck cancer mortality rates have risen by 18% (from 6.0 per 100k in 2011-13, to 7.1 per 100k in 2021-23)
- Uterine cancer mortality rates have risen by 14% (from 6.4 per 100k females in 2011-13, to 7.3 per 100k females in 2021-23)
- Kidney cancer mortality rates have risen by 4% (from 7.4 per 100k in 2011-13, to 7.7 per 100k in 2021-23)

The increase in mortality rate for these cancer sites reflect increasing incidence rates over the same time period.

Table 1: The 10 Most Common Cancers, Percentage Change in European Age-Standardised Mortality Rates (ASMR), UK, 2011-2013 to 2021-2023

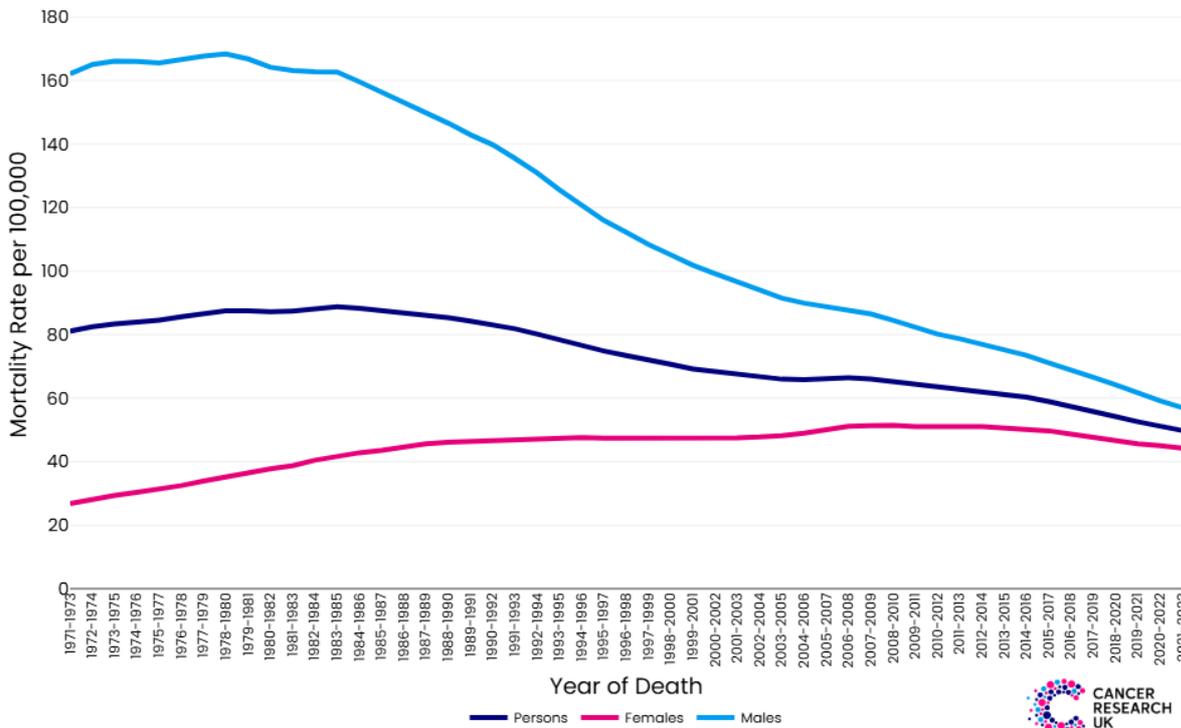
Cancer	Sex	2011-2013 ASMR	2021-2023 ASMR	Percentage change
Lung	Male	78.7	57.0	-27.5%
	Female	51.0	44.2	-13.4%
Bowel	Male	35.9	32.4	-9.7%
	Female	22.4	21.4	-4.7%
Prostate	Male	49.0	43.9	-10.6%
Breast	Female	36.4	30.7	-15.6%
Pancreas	Male	16.9	16.9	-
	Female	13.5	13.7	-
Cancer of Unknown Primary	Male	20.7	16.1	-22.5%
	Female	17.4%	14.0	-20.0%
Oesophagus	Male	20.7	18.3	-11.2%
	Female	7.7	6.5	-15.3%
Liver	Male	10.7	12.6	+18.5%
	Female	5.7	6.8	+18.3%
Bladder	Male	15.2	13.9	-8.4%
	Female	5.2	4.9	-5.9%
Brain, Other CNS, and intracranial tumours	Male	10.6	10.0	-5.2%
	Female	7.3	6.8	-7.3%

Common cancers

Lung cancer is the most common cause of cancer death for both males and females in the UK and accounts for 1 in 5 (20%) of all cancer deaths (2021–23). More than half (52%) of lung cancer deaths are in people aged 75 and over, reflecting both the growing and aging UK population but also the impact of long-term exposure to risk factors such as smoking.

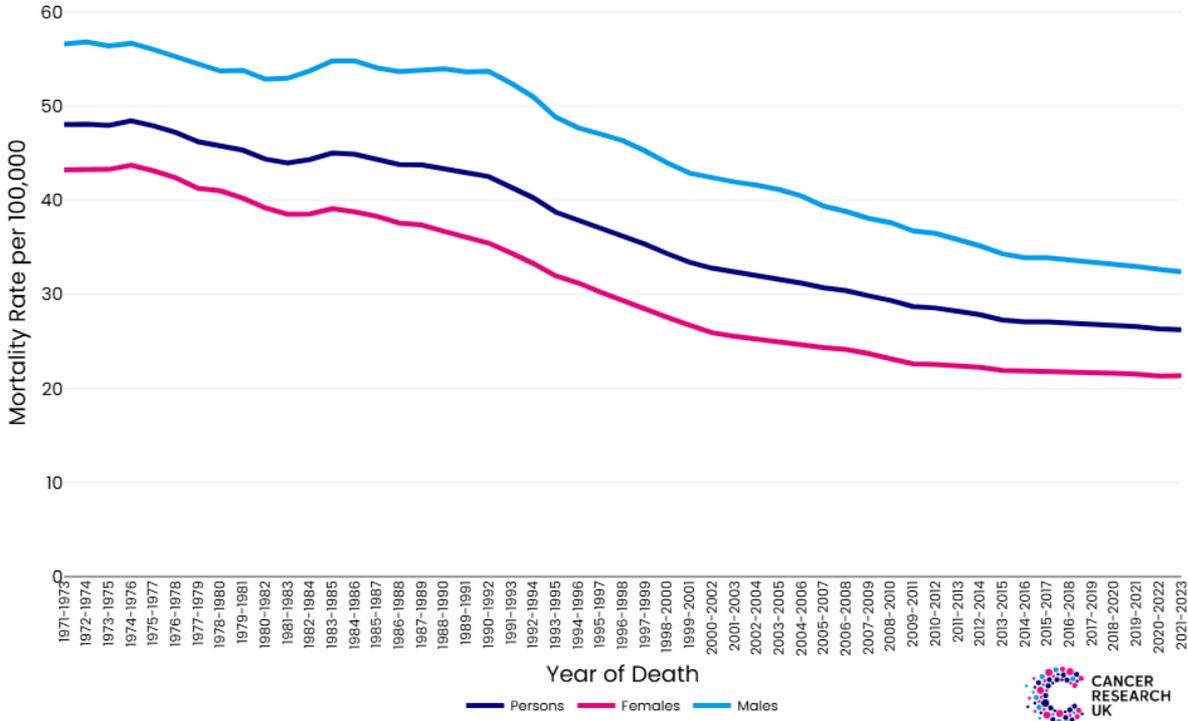
There has been a decrease in lung cancer mortality over time, with rates falling by around a fifth (21%) over the past decade, but this has been driven mostly by falling rates in males (Figure 3). While lung cancer mortality rates are significantly lower in females than in males, rates have fallen by more than a quarter (28%) over the last decade in males, but only by 13% in females. This reflects an increase in lung cancer incidence in females over the past decade, while rates in males decreased, as well as improvements in lung cancer survival.

Figure 3: Lung Cancer (C33–C34), European Age-Standardised Mortality Rates per 100,000 Persons, UK, 1971–2023



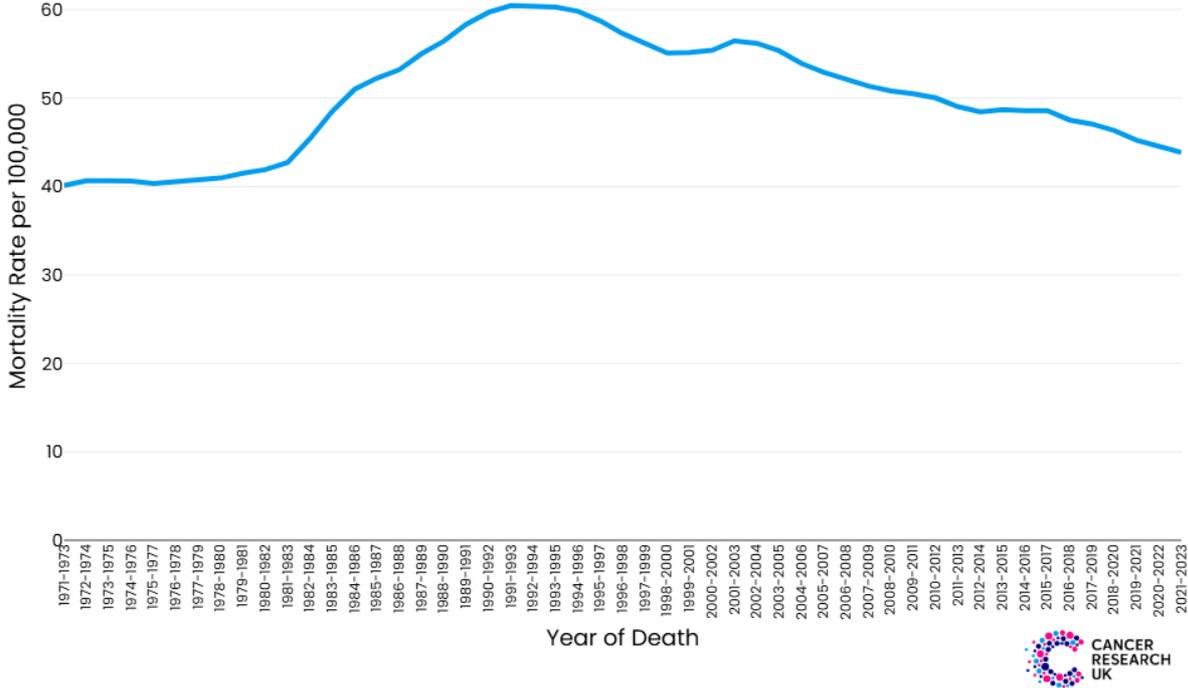
Bowel cancer is the second most common cause of cancer death in the UK, accounting for 10% of all cancer deaths (2021-23). Around three-fifths (59%) of bowel cancer deaths are in people aged 75 and over. There has been a decrease in bowel cancer mortality over time, with rates falling by 7% over the past decade (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Bowel Cancer (C18-C20), European Age-Standardised Mortality Rates per 100,000 Persons, UK, 1971-2023



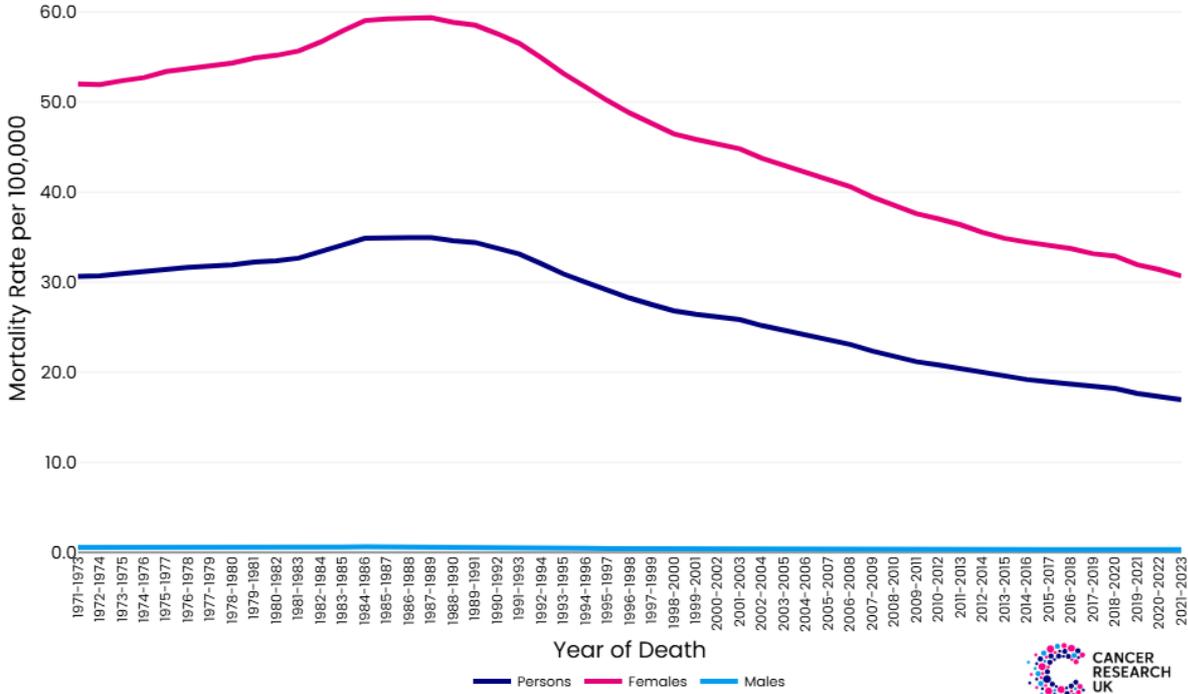
Prostate cancer is the third most common cause of cancer death overall, but the second leading cause for males, accounting for 14% of all male cancer deaths in the UK (2021-23). Prostate cancer has an older age profile than most other cancers, with around three-quarters (76%) of prostate cancer deaths occurring in males aged 75 and over. There has been a decrease in prostate cancer mortality rates over time, with rates falling by around a tenth (11%) over the past decade (Figure 5). Despite this, there were around 12,200 prostate cancer deaths in 2021-23, the highest on record, reflecting increasing incidence rates.

Figure 5: Prostate Cancer (C61), European Age-Standardised Mortality Rates per 100,000 Men, UK, 1971-2023



Breast cancer is the fourth most common cause of cancer death overall, but the second leading cause for females, accounting for 14% of all female cancer deaths in the UK (2021-23). While half (50%) of breast cancer deaths are in people aged 75 and over, more than a fifth (22%) occur in people aged 50-64, and almost a tenth (8%) in people aged under 50. There has been a decrease in breast cancer mortality rates over time, with rates falling by 17% over the past decade to a rate of 31 per 100k females, the lowest breast cancer mortality rate on record (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Breast Cancer (C50), European Age-Standardised Mortality Rates per 100,000 Persons, UK, 1971-2023



Appendix

Table 1: All Cancers (C00–C97), Annual Average Number of Deaths and European Age–Standardised Rates per 100,000 Population, UK, 2021–2023

		England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland	United Kingdom
Females	Deaths	64,416	7,973	4,226	2,226	78,841
	Crude Rate	221.1	284.4	264.4	229.2	228.5
	ASR	211.3	257.1	226.5	231.1	216.5
	ASR 95% LCI	210.4	253.8	222.6	225.6	215.6
	ASR 95% UCI	212.2	260.4	230.5	236.7	217.4
Males	Deaths	73,854	8,547	4,846	2,420	89,666
	Crude Rate	263.9	322.7	315.5	257.2	270.8
	ASR	298.7	347.2	316.4	313.4	304.1
	ASR 95% LCI	297.5	342.9	311.2	306.2	302.9
	ASR 95% UCI	300.0	351.4	321.5	320.6	305.2
Persons	Deaths	138,270	16,520	9,072	4,646	168,507
	Crude Rate	242.1	303.0	289.4	243.0	249.2
	ASR	248.5	295.1	264.9	266.1	253.8
	ASR 95% LCI	247.8	292.5	261.7	261.7	253.1
	ASR 95% UCI	249.3	297.7	268.0	270.5	254.5