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Coverage
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Theme
Health and Care

Heart disease leading cause of death in England & Wales

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Heart disease (including heart attacks) was the leading cause of death for both sexes in England and Wales in 2005, accounting for one in five male deaths and around one in six female, according to a new report* published today by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

A new ranking of leading causes of death also found that cerebrovascular disease (mainly strokes) was the second leading cause of death for both sexes, followed by cancer of the trachea, bronchus and lung for males and influenza and pneumonia for women.

Health Statistics Quarterly 30 contains new and up-to-date statistics on births, deaths and other health-related topics. In this issue there are new statistics on: death registrations in England and Wales in 2005 by cause; and deaths involving *Clostridium difficile* in England and Wales between 1999 – 2004.

There are feature articles on: trends in mortality from Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease and dementia in England and Wales, 1979 – 2004; and risk factors for low birthweight based on birth registration and census information, England and Wales 1981 – 2000.

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New statistics in this issue:

Death registrations in England and Wales, 2005: causes

This report contains a new ranking of the leading causes of death in England and Wales, produced for the first time following a consultation by ONS. It found:

- Heart disease (including heart attacks) was the leading cause of death for both sexes in England and Wales in 2005 accounting for one in five male deaths and around one in six female.
- Cerebrovascular disease (mainly strokes) was the second leading causes of death for both sexes and accounted for a higher proportion of females deaths (12.9 per cent) than males (7.9 per cent).
- Cancer of the trachea, bronchus and lung was the third leading cause of death for males (6.9 per cent) while it was the sixth leading cause for females (4.5 per cent). The third leading cause for females was influenza and pneumonia (7.9 per cent).
- Dementia (including Alzheimer's disease) was the fourth leading cause of death among females (5.2 per cent) and the ninth leading cause among males (2.1 per cent).
- Breast cancer was the seventh leading cause of death for females (4.5 per cent) while prostate cancer was the sixth leading cause of death for males (3.7 per cent).



Deaths involving *Clostridium difficile*: England and Wales, 1999 -2004

This is the first report on deaths in England and Wales between 1999 and 2004 where *Clostridium difficile* (*C. difficile*) infection was mentioned on the death certificate as a contributory factor. It found:

- Mentions of *C. difficile* on death certificates increased from 975 in 1999 to 2247 in 2004.
- Among deaths with a mention of *C. difficile*, the percentage for which it was identified as the underlying cause was similar (around 55 per cent) in each year.
- Most deaths involving *C. difficile* occurred among people aged 65 and over.
- Between 2001 and 2004, 92.4 per cent of deaths involving *C. difficile* occurred in NHS general hospitals (compared with 56 per cent of all deaths). However many of these deaths in hospital will have been of patients who were admitted because they were already seriously ill with another condition.

Feature articles in this issue:

Trends in mortality from Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease and dementia, 1979 – 2004 by Clare Griffiths and Cleo Rooney

New analysis by ONS has found that death rates between 1979 and 2004, where the underlying cause was Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease or dementia were strongly affected by changes to the rules for coding causes of death that occurred during this period.

ONS also examined trends in deaths using data on all mentions of these conditions on death certificates which were not affected by coding changes in this period. This analysis found:

- Death rates based on mentions of Alzheimer's disease increased dramatically over the period 1985 to 2004 by eight times for males and 12 times for females.
- This increase was partly due to an increasing tendency to record Alzheimer's disease (as the cause of dementia) on death certificates, following from an increasing recognition of Alzheimer's as the disease underlying much dementia.
- Mortality rates based on mentions of Parkinson's disease declined over the same time period, by 22 per cent for males and 32 per cent for females.
- Between 1985 and 2004, trends in mentions of dementia at death differed between males and females, with rates remaining relatively stable among males, but increasing among females.



Risk factors for low birthweight based on birth registration and census information, England and Wales, 1981 – 2000 by Aleks Collingwood Bakeo and Lynda Clarke

Birthweight is a strong predictor of infant mortality and of health outcomes in childhood and adulthood. This study uses data from the ONS Longitudinal Study (LS) to examine socio-demographic factors associated with low birthweight in England and Wales. For births in the 1990s it found:

- The factor most strongly associated with low birthweight was being born outside marriage and registered by the mother alone – even after taking into account the mother's socio-economic status.
- Mothers from non-white ethnic groups had a 62 per cent increased risk of having a low birthweight baby when compared with white mothers, after taking into account their age at the time of the birth and the characteristics of their household and area where they lived.
- Mothers living in the most deprived areas had a higher risk of having a low birthweight baby compared with mothers living in the least deprived area (29 per cent), after taking account of their age at the time of birth, ethnicity and whether they had a limiting long-term illness.

BACKGROUND NOTES

1. Headline statistics on deaths in England and Wales registered in 2005 were published by ONS on 18 May 2005:
<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/bd0506.pdf>
2. ONS published a consultation document on ranking leading causes of death in England and Wales on 31 January 2006. The consultation period ended on 13 March 2006.
3. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available from the press office.
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