

Search



- [Home](#)
- [Ageing Well](#)
- [Ageing well](#)
- [Excess Winter Deaths](#)
- [Mental Health in Older People](#)

[Home](#) > [Ageing Well](#) > Excess Winter Deaths

Excess Winter Deaths



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Introduction

Across the UK there is rise in the number of deaths in the winter months compared to the warmer months of the year. This difference in the number of deaths during the winter period compared to the warmer months is known as excess winter mortality. Excess winter deaths figures are widely used to inform policy, planning and research in the public sector, in particular to measure the effectiveness of cold weather planning. Local authorities and public health organisations across England and Wales use our data to assess levels of excess winter mortality in their area. In addition, charities use excess winter deaths statistics to support a variety of campaigns.

Facts and Figure

Excess winter deaths are defined by the Office for National Statistics as the difference between the number of deaths during the four winter months (December to March) and the average number of deaths during the preceding August to November and the following April to July. Comparing absolute numbers of excess winter deaths among different areas and from year to year is difficult as the numbers are dependent on the total numbers of deaths that occurred in a particular setting. The comparison is made using the excess winter deaths index (EWDI). This is the ratio of excess winter deaths to average non-winter deaths expressed as a percentage.

- In Blackpool during the period 2003/04 – 2017/18 there were 18.7% more deaths in winter than in summer (the excess winter deaths index). This is comparable with the England figure of 18.5%
- In the winter of 2017/18 there were 180 excess winter deaths in Blackpool
- Winter periods have a greater impact on older people. In Blackpool during the period 2003/04 – 2012/12 the excess winter deaths index for those aged under 65 was 13.8% and aged over 85 was 24.4%
- Although Excess winter deaths are associated with low temperatures, conditions directly relating to cold, such as hypothermia, are not the main cause of EWM. The majority of additional winter deaths are caused by cerebrovascular diseases, ischaemic heart disease, respiratory diseases and influenza

Figure 1 shows that there is huge fluctuation between winters and the Blackpool trend broadly follows the England and North West trends. Blackpool is subject to many of the same risk factors as the rest of the country, such as winter temperatures and influenza outbreaks.

Figure 1 - Excess Winter Deaths Index - 1991/92 - 2017/18



Source:

ONS

National and local strategies (current best practices)

- [The Cold Weather Plan for England](#) (NHS England, 2015) - aims to prevent avoidable harm to health by alerting people to the negative health effects of cold weather. This should enable them to prepare and respond appropriately, and help to reduce the number of excess winter deaths. The plan sets out a series of actions to be taken by the NHS, social care and other agencies throughout the year, and in response to forecast or actual severe winter weather. It also encourages local communities to support the most vulnerable in their area, such as checking on them during severe weather and offering other support.
- ['Keep Warm Keep Well' booklet](#) (Public Health England, 2018) - provides advice on staying well during cold weather, for example healthy lifestyle, heating, flu vaccinations, and making sure that people know about all the benefits and services to which they are entitled.
- [Annual Flu Programme](#) (Public Health England) - sets out a coordinated and evidence-based approach to planning for, and responding to, the demands of influenza across England.

[↑ Back to top](#)

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