



DECEMBERⁱ



Births and Deaths

As winter approaches, deaths from circulatory and respiratory diseases – the major causes of excess winter mortality – increase. Deaths from circulatory diseases are expected to be high in the latter part of December, with a rise to a very substantial peak in January before falling to more usual levels at the end of winter. Respiratory disease deaths, which will steadily increase from the beginning of September, are expected to increase to high levels towards the end of the year.



Poor Health and Illness

Cases of asthma will be high during the early part of the month, but are then expected to fall to lower levels with no increase then expected until the following autumn. The incidence of chest pain is likely to be high in the first half of the month, but will then drop to a lower level for the first time since spring.

In the latter half of December, other conditions will be more prevalent. The levels of chronic lung disease will grow throughout the month and is expected to increase dramatically at the very end of the year for a short two-week high. In addition, cases of heart failure will escalate in the last couple of weeks of the year. This high is expected to be sustained well into spring.



Injury and Violence

In the early part of the month, the incidence of self-harm will be high, continuing an ongoing trend. However, after this the number of cases is expected to fall, and for the first time in months will no longer be considered high.

A significant increase in violence is likely to occur in the last couple of weeks of December, encompassing the holiday period.

Falls are also an issue in December. The incidence of falls amongst the 65+ year old population, although already high in the latter half of November, will be higher again in December – with this month being the highest in the year. In addition, in the last week of the year the incidence of falls amongst the 35 to 64 year old population will dramatically increase and the second highest weekly incidence of the year is expected. This is likely to be the first week of a very short-term peak – as little as two weeks later the number of cases of falls amongst this age group is expected to decrease by over 20%.



Gastro-intestinal Infections

December is the highest month for cases of norovirus. More cases will be reported in the last three weeks of the year than in any identical time period in the year. Unlike most gastro-intestinal infections, which are more prevalent during the summer and early autumn months than at other times of the year, norovirus occurs more often in the late autumn and winter months.

ⁱ Definitions and data sources for all conditions - www.nwpho.org.uk/healthcalendar/docs/about.pdf