

Rise in mortality in England and Wales in first sixteen weeks of 2018

08 May 2018

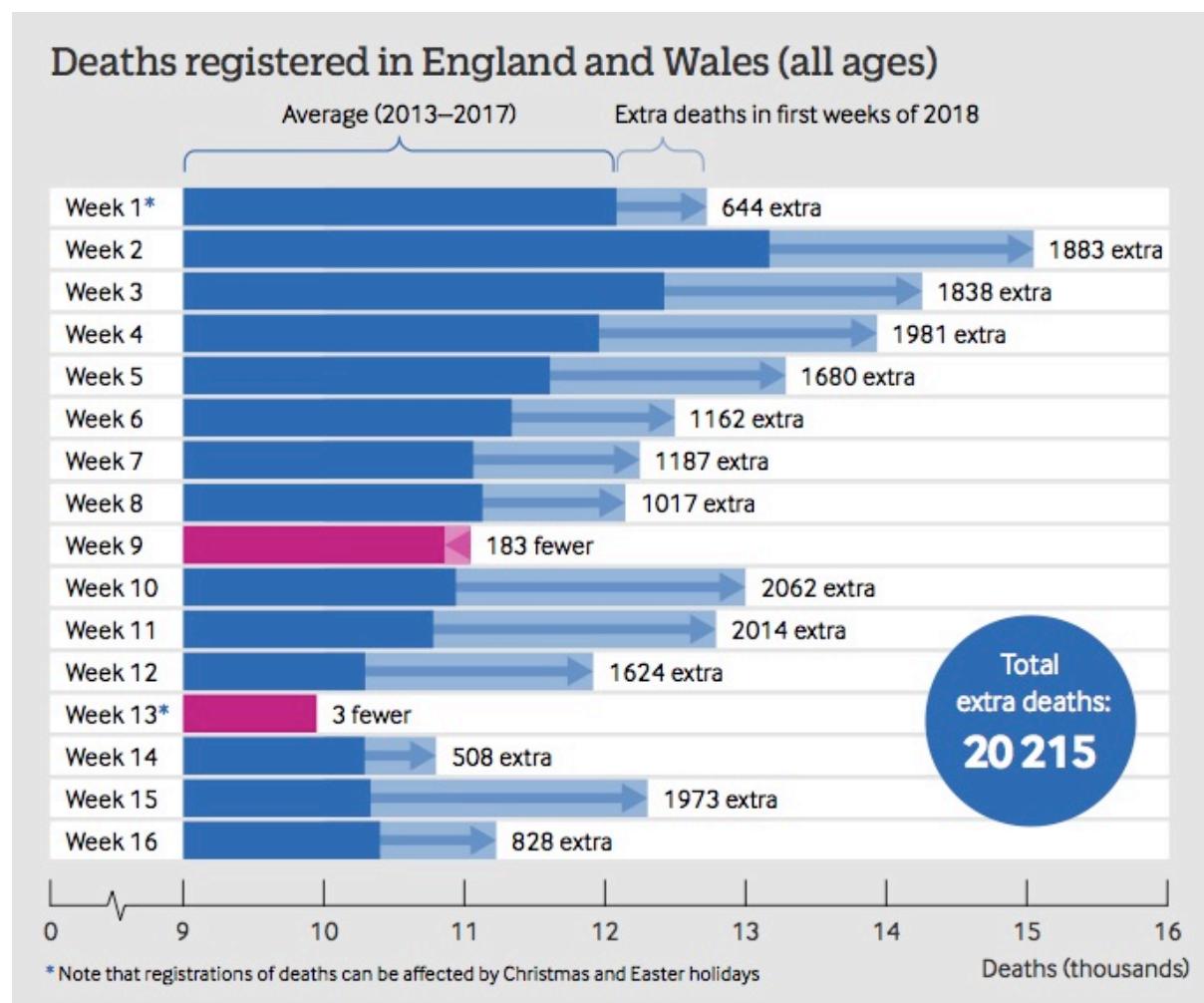
Lucinda Hiam

Honorary research fellow

Professor Danny Dorling, University of Oxford

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

[@lu_hiam](https://twitter.com/lu_hiam) [@dannydorling](https://twitter.com/dannydorling)



We recently wrote an editorial in the BMJ repeating many previous calls for an investigation into rising deaths in England and Wales.(1) By week 7 of 2018, 10,000 more people had died than the average of the last five years. We showed that neither 'flu, nor cold weather appeared to be the main cause.

The latest Office for National Statistics data on weekly provisional deaths in England and Wales sadly provide little reassurance of this being a ‘blip’ as some have suggested. By the end of week number 16 (week ending 20 April), 20,215 more people have died than the average for the last 5 years.(2) Yet, still, no action taken or even mention of a possible investigation has been heard from the Department of Health and Social Care. How many deaths will it take for the Government to take note?

- (1) Hiam, L. and Dorling, D. (2018) Rise in mortality in England and Wales in first seven weeks of 2018, British Medical Journal, 2018;360:k1090, March 14th, http://www.dannydorling.org/?page_id=6424
- (2) Office for National Statistics. Weekly provisional deaths for England and Wales. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarri...> (last updated 1 May 2018; accessed 7 May 2018)

Note, in addition to this response a by David Robinson and his colleagues on 18 March 2018: <https://www.bmjjournals.org/content/360/bmj.k1090/rr-2>

Death rate continues to rise for poorest infants in England and Wales

Dear Dr Godlee,

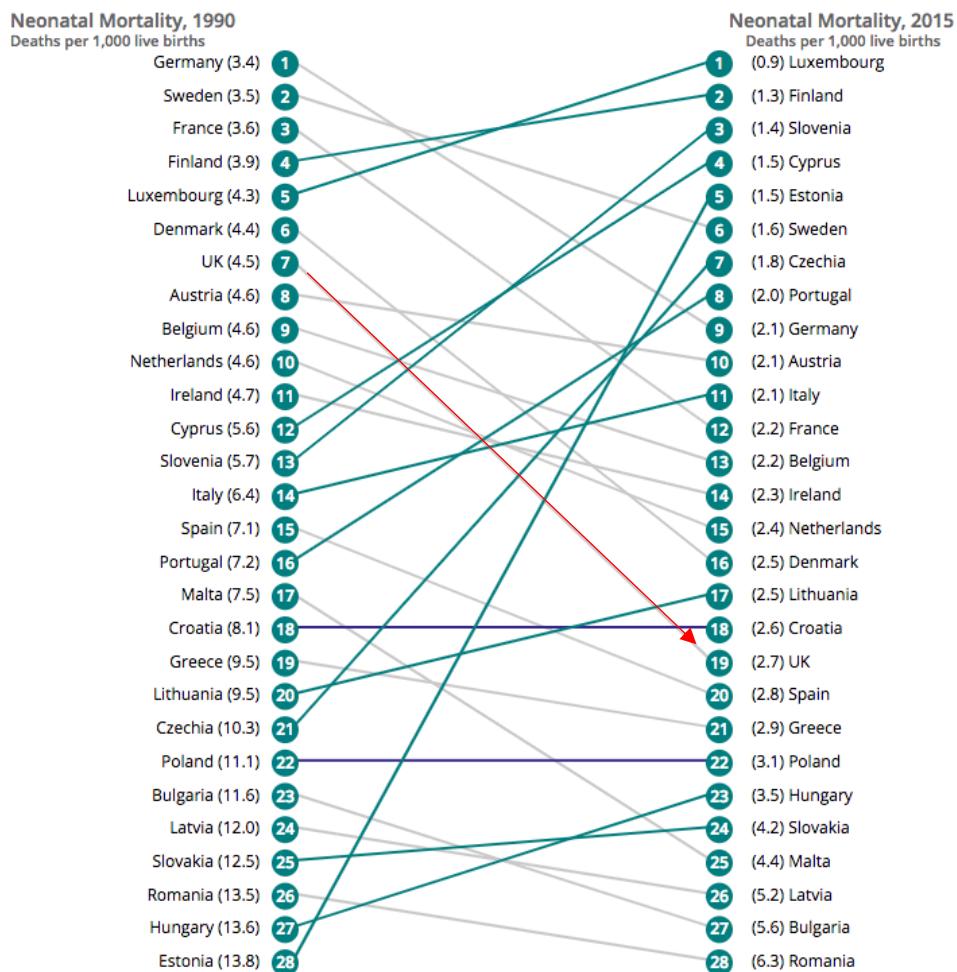
Last year we raised concern about the rise in infant mortality in England and Wales in a letter to the BMJ.(1) The latest data released by the ONS this week shows that infant mortality has risen for the second year running.(2) In 2016 there were 2651 infant deaths, compared to 2578 and 2517 in the preceding two years. The statistically significant increase in infant mortality rate from 3.6 to 3.8 deaths per thousand live births over these two years (p -value = 0.037) is explained by the 5.3% increase in infant deaths, rather than by any change in the denominator which showed only negligible change. ...

(1.) Taylor-Robinson D, Barr B. Death rate now rising in UK's poorest infants. *BMJ* (Clinical research ed) 2017;357:j2258. doi: 10.1136/bmj.j2258 [published Online First: 2017/05/13]

(2.) Office for National Statistics. Child mortality in England and Wales: 2016. Statistical Bulletin, 2018.

The rise in infant mortality in the two years up to 2016 will further steepen the line of relative rises (now absolute rise) in neonatal mortality rates in the UK as compared to other European countries:

Neonatal mortality rankings, European Union countries, 1990 to 2015



Source, ONS (2017) UK drops in European child mortality rankings, October 13th 2017, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/childhealth/articles/ukdropsineuropeanchildmortalityrankings/2017-10-13>

"The neonatal mortality rate indicates the probability of dying in the first 28 days of life. In 1990, the UK was seventh in the European Union with a neonatal mortality rate of 4.5 deaths per 1,000 live births. Germany, Sweden, France, Finland, Luxembourg and Denmark were ahead of the UK with lower neonatal mortality rates. The worst performing countries were Romania, Hungary and Estonia, which had neonatal mortality rates of 13.5, 13.6 and 13.8 respectively. Yet by 2015, Estonia had managed to overtake the UK, coming in at fifth place with a rate of 1.5, while the UK was pushed back to 19th with a slightly higher rate of 2.7. Other countries with a similar neonatal mortality rate to the UK include Croatia (2.6), Lithuania and Denmark (both at 2.5), and Spain (2.8)." And then the UK neonatal rate rose during 2015 and 2016 accelerating the rate of fall of the UK in the league table above.