



stats sa

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Mortality and causes of death in South Africa, Trends data 1997–2020

Metadata

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IMPROVING LIVES THROUGH DATA ECOSYSTEMS



The metadata file contains the following information for each variable:

- **Descriptive name of variables:**

A brief description of the variable name.

- **Variable name:**

The name of the variable (provided in brackets) and as heading for the value labels.

- **Type and position of the variable:**

The type and position of a variable within a record is recorded in the format *type (@xxx L)*. The *type* specifies if the variable is a numeric or a character (string/alphanumeric variables). *@xxx* indicates the *position* (column) at which the variable starts. *L* indicates the length of the field.

- **Note to users:**

The note is provided for each variable to provide additional information for further clarity on questions and definition of concepts.

Other relevant information is available on the Statistics South Africa website (www.statssa.gov.za) or from User Information Services:

- Statistical release on Mortality and causes of death in South Africa, 1997–2003: Findings from death notification
- Statistical release on Mortality and causes of death in South Africa, 2004: Findings from death notification
- Statistical release on Mortality and causes of death in South Africa, 2005: Findings from death notification
- Statistical release on Mortality and causes of death in South Africa, 2006: Findings from death notification
- Statistical release on Mortality and causes of death in South Africa, 2007: Findings from death notification
- Statistical release on Mortality and causes of death in South Africa, 2008: Findings from death notification
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- Statistical release on Mortality and causes of death in South Africa, 2010: Findings from death notification
- Statistical release on Mortality and causes of death in South Africa, 2011: Findings from death notification
- Statistical release on Mortality and causes of death in South Africa, 2012: Findings from death notification
- Statistical release on Mortality and causes of death in South Africa, 2013: Findings from death notification
- Statistical release on Mortality and causes of death in South Africa, 2014: Findings from death notification
- Statistical release on Mortality and causes of death in South Africa, 2015: Findings from death notification

- Statistical release on Mortality and causes of death in South Africa, 2016: Findings from death notification
- Statistical release on Mortality and causes of death in South Africa, 2017: Findings from death notification
- Statistical release on Mortality and causes of death in South Africa, 2018: Findings from death notification
- Statistical release on Mortality and causes of death in South Africa, 2019: Findings from death notification
- Statistical release on Mortality and causes of death in South Africa, 2020: Findings from death notification

Methodology

1 System design

The registration of deaths is governed by the Births and Deaths Registration Act, 1992 (Act No. 51 of 1992 as amended), and is administered by the Department of Home Affairs using Forms BI-1663 and DHA-1663 (Notification/Register of death/stillbirth). After a death is registered, the Department of Home Affairs issues a death certificate and, where applicable, updates the population register. The forms are then collected by Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) for processing.

The processing of death notification forms includes sorting, pasting, pre-coding, coding and capturing. The process of sorting involves sorting the forms by year of death, month, day and finally by surname of the deceased in alphabetical order. The main purpose of sorting is to identify and remove duplicates. During data processing, unique identifiers (serial numbers) are developed for each form for the purpose of tracking the forms through the different processing phases. Because of the complexity of the coding of diseases, Stats SA decided that all demographic and socio-economic variables on the forms, except the actual causes of death, should be pre-coded to expedite the process. Thereafter, the causes of death are manually coded.

Coding the information on causes of death followed a two-step process entailing initial coding and verification by more experienced coders. The causes of death data presented were coded by procedures described in the Stats SA manual guidelines for coders using ICD-10. The ICD-10 (10th revision of the International Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems) coding provides the basic guidance used in virtually all countries to code and classify causes of death data. It provides information on coding in terms of disease, injury and poisoning categories. It also provides the rules for selecting the underlying cause of death from the several diagnoses that may be reported on the death certificate, as well as definitions, tabulation lists, guidelines for the death notification form, and regulations on the use of the classification.

After all processes have been undertaken, the data are captured and duplicates are verified to ensure that all the death notification forms removed as duplicates during sorting were indeed duplicates, and to identify any that were mistakenly taken out as duplicates. The data are then edited, and inconsistent cases manually verified.

2 Coverage

The target population is all deaths that occurred in the period 1997–2020 and registered at the Department of Home Affairs. It therefore excludes deaths that might not be registered for 2020, and deaths that have been registered, but had not reached Stats SA during the 2023/2024 processing phase.

3 Datasets

The 1997-2020 time-series datasets are three. The three datasets are linked using unique serial number.

3.1 Deceased and death information (Fact_MCOD2020_Deceased_Info)

The dataset contains records of the deceased and information relating to death. There are twenty variables in the dataset.

3.2 Dates information (Fact_MCOD2020_Dates_Info)

The dataset contains information relating about dates of birth, deaths, registration, and processing. There are eleven variables in the dataset.

3.3 Causes of deaths (Fact_MCOD2020_Causes_Info)

The dataset contains records of all causes linked to each deceased record. There are fourteen variables in the dataset. One serial number of the deceased is linked to one record of cause of death.

4 Confidentiality

The information remains confidential to Stats SA. The Statistics Act, 1999 (Act No. 6 of 1999) prohibits the disclosure of information regarding individuals to any person concerned or his/her lawful representative. Therefore, the information on mortality and causes of death published does not include personal information about the deceased or informants and is released in such a way that no individual can be identified.

Note: Unknown: Refers to cases where more than one option was marked, or the response was not legible.

Not applicable: Means the response does not apply to a particular case in question.

Unspecified: Refers to cases where no response was given.

The metadata file contains the following information for each variable:

- **Descriptive name of variables:**
A brief description of the variable name.
- **Variable name:**
The name of the variable (provided in brackets) and as heading for the value labels.
- **Type and position of the variable:**
The type and position of a variable within a record is recorded in the format (*@xxx L*) where *@xxx* indicates the position (column) at which the variable starts, and *L* indicates the length of the field.
- **Note to users:**
The note is provided for each variable to provide additional information for further clarity on questions and definition of concepts.

A. INDIVIDUAL PARTICULARS AND DEATH INFORMATION (FACT_MCOD2020_DECEASED_INFO)**Unique sequence number (SerialNo)**

(@1 11)

1.	SerialNo
-----------	-----------------

Note to users

This variable is derived from the pasted label automatically created to provide a unique identifier for each death notification form.

Valid range: 19969882401–20200511800

Type of death (DeathType)

(@12 1)

2.	DeathType 1 = Individual death 2 = Stillbirth
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Note to users

Individual death is a death that occurred any time after a live birth had taken place. Stillbirth is the intra-uterine death of a foetus of at least 26 weeks of gestation that showed no sign of life after complete birth.

Final code list

- 1 = Individual death
- 2 = Stillbirth
- 9 = Unspecified

Age in completed years (AgeYear)

(@13 3)

3.	AgeYear
-----------	----------------

Note to users

This variable refers to the age of the deceased in completed years at the time of death.

Final code list

- Valid range: 0–130
- 999 = Unspecified

Sex of deceased (Sex)

(@16 1)

4.	Sex 1 = Male 2 = Female 3 = Undeterminable
-----------	--

Note to users

This variable provides information on the sex of the deceased.

Final code list

- 1 = Male
- 2 = Female
- 3 = Undeterminable
- 8 = Unknown
- 9 = Unspecified

Marital status of deceased (MStatus)

(@17 1)

5.	MStatus 1 = Never married 2 = Married 3 = Widowed 4 = Divorced
-----------	---

Note to users

This variable provides information on the marital status of the deceased.

Final code list

- 1 = Never married
- 2 = Married
- 3 = Widowed
- 4 = Divorced
- 5 = Not applicable
- 8 = Unknown
- 9 = Unspecified

Relationship of informant to deceased (Relationship)

(@18 1)

6.	Relationship 1 = Parent 2 = Spouse 3 = Child 4 = Other kin 5 = Other
-----------	--

Note to users

This variable provides information on the relationship of the informant to the deceased.

Final code list

- 1 = Parent
- 2 = Spouse
- 3 = Child
- 4 = Other kin
- 5 = Other

8 = Unknown
9 = Unspecified

Education of deceased (EduCode)

(@19 2)

7.	EduCode
	0 = None
	1 = Grade R
	2 = Sub A Gr 1
	3 = Sub B Gr 2
	4 = Std 1 Gr 3
	5 = Std 2 Gr 4
	6 = Std 3 Gr 5
	7 = Std 4 Gr 6
	8 = Std 5 Gr 7
	9 = Std 6 Gr 8
	10 = Std 7 Gr 9
	11 = Std 8 Gr 10 Form 3 NTC1
	12 = Std 9 Gr 11 Form 4 NTC2
	13 = Std 10 Gr 12 Form 5 NTC3
	14 = University / Tech

Note to users

This variable provides information on the highest level of education that the deceased completed or achieved.

Final code list

0 = None
1 = Grade R
2 = Sub A Gr 1
3 = Sub B Gr 2
4 = Std 1 Gr 3
5 = Std 2 Gr 4
6 = Std 3 Gr 5
7 = Std 4 Gr 6
8 = Std 5 Gr 7
9 = Std 6 Gr 8
10 = Std 7 Gr 9
11 = Std 8 Gr 10 Form 3 NTC1
12 = Std 9 Gr 11 Form 4 NTC2
13 = Std 10 Gr 12 Form 5 NTC3
14 = University / Tech
97 = Unknown
98 = Not applicable
99 = Unspecified

Groups of occupation of deceased (OccupationGrp)**(@21 2)**

8.	<p>OccupationGrp</p> <p>0 = Occupations unspecified and not elsewhere specified and not economically active persons</p> <p>1 = Managers</p> <p>2 = Professionals</p> <p>3 = Technicians and associate professionals</p> <p>4 = Clerical support workers</p> <p>5 = Service and sales workers and armed forces</p> <p>6 = Skilled agricultural and fishery workers</p> <p>7 = Craft and related trades workers</p> <p>8 = Plant and machine operators, and assemblers</p> <p>9 = Elementary occupations</p>
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Note to users

This variable provides information on the usual occupation of the deceased. Usual occupation refers to the type of work done by the deceased during most of his or her working life.

Final code list

- 0 = Occupations unspecified and not elsewhere specified and not economically active persons
- 1 = Managers
- 2 = Professionals
- 3 = Technicians and associate professionals
- 4 = Clerical support workers
- 5 = Service and sales workers and armed forces
- 6 = Skilled agricultural and fishery workers
- 7 = Craft and related trade workers
- 8 = Plant and machine operators, and assemblers
- 9 = Elementary occupations
- 99 = Not applicable

Type of business / industry where the deceased was working (Industry)**(@23 2)**

9.	<p>Industry</p> <p>0 = Private household, extraterritorial organisations, representatives of foreign governments & other activities not adequately defined</p> <p>1 = Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing</p> <p>2 = Mining and quarrying</p> <p>3 = Manufacturing</p> <p>4 = Electricity, gas and water supply</p> <p>5 = Construction</p> <p>6 = Wholesale and retail; repair of motor cycles and personal and household goods; hotels and restaurants</p> <p>7 = Transport storage and communication</p> <p>8 = Financial intermediation insurance, real estate and business services</p> <p>9 = Community, social and personal services</p>
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Note to users

This variable provides information on the usual industry of the deceased. Usual industry refers to the place of work the deceased spent most of his or her working life.

Final code list

- 0 = Occupations unspecified and not elsewhere specified and not economically active persons
- 1 = Managers
- 2 = Professionals
- 3 = Technicians and associate professionals
- 4 = Clerical support workers
- 5 = Service and sales workers and armed forces
- 6 = Skilled agricultural and fishery workers
- 7 = Craft and related trade workers
- 8 = Plant and machine operators and assemblers
- 9 = Elementary occupations
- 97 = Unknown
- 98 = Not applicable
- 99 = Unspecified

Smoking status of deceased (Smoker)

(@25 1)

10.	Smoker
	1 = Yes
	2 = No
	3 = Do not know
	4 = Not applicable

Note to users

This variable provides information on the smoking status of the deceased five years before death. A smoker is defined as someone who smoked any form of tobacco on most days (an average of more than six months a year, or four or more days a week), five years ago. If smoking started less than five years before death, the answer is No. If smoking started more than five years before death, but for less than six months, the answer is No.

Final code list

- 1 = Yes
- 2 = No
- 3 = Do not know
- 4 = Not applicable
- 8 = Unknown
- 9 = Unspecified

Pregnancy status of deceased 42 days prior to death (Pregnancy)**(@26 1)**

11.	Pregnancy 1 = Yes 2 = No
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Note to users

This variable provides information on whether or not females of reproductive age (10–55) were pregnant 42 days prior to death.

Final code list

- 1 = Yes
- 2 = No
- 3 = Not applicable
- 8 = Unknown
- 9 = Unspecified

Population group of the deceased (PopGroup)**(@27 1)**

12.	PopGroup 1 = Black 2 = White 3 = Indian or Asian 4 = Coloured 5 = Other
------------	---

Note to users

This variable provides information on the population group of the deceased.

Final code list

- 1 = Black African
- 2 = White
- 3 = Indian or Asian
- 4 = Coloured
- 5 = Other
- 8 = Unknown
- 9 = Unspecified

Citizenship of deceased (Citizenship)**(@28 2)**

13.	Citizenship 1 = South Africa 2 = Zimbabwe 3 = Swaziland 4 = Botswana 5 = Lesotho 6 = Mozambique
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	7 = Namibia
	8 = Mauritius
	9 = Angola
	10 = Zambia
	11 = Malawi
	12 = Tanzania
	13 = Madagascar
	14 = Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)
	15 = Other

Note to users

This variable provides information on the place of citizenship of the deceased.

Final code list

- 1 = South Africa
- 2 = Zimbabwe
- 3 = Swaziland
- 4 = Botswana
- 5 = Lesotho
- 6 = Mozambique
- 7 = Namibia
- 8 = Mauritius
- 9 = Angola
- 10 = Zambia
- 11 = Malawi
- 12 = Tanzania
- 13 = Madagascar
- 14 = Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)
- 15 = Other
- 97 = Unknown
- 99 = Unspecified

Province of birth of the deceased (BirthProvince)

(@30 2)

14.	BirthProv
	1 = Western Cape
	2 = Eastern Cape
	3 = Northern Cape
	4 = Free State
	5 = KwaZulu-Natal
	6 = North West
	7 = Gauteng
	8 = Mpumalanga
	9 = Limpopo

Note to users

This variable provides information on the province of birth of the deceased based on the 2011 municipal boundaries. It was derived from the place code of birth.

Final code list

- 1 = Western Cape
- 2 = Eastern Cape
- 3 = Northern Cape
- 4 = Free State
- 5 = KwaZulu-Natal
- 6 = North West
- 7 = Gauteng
- 8 = Mpumalanga
- 9 = Limpopo
- 96 = Unknown
- 98 = Outside South Africa

Province of death occurrence (DeathProvince)

(@32 2)

15.	DeathProv 1 = Western Cape 2 = Eastern Cape 3 = Northern Cape 4 = Free State 5 = KwaZulu-Natal 6 = North West 7 = Gauteng 8 = Mpumalanga 9 = Limpopo
------------	--

Note to users

This variable provides information on the province of death of the deceased based on the 2011 municipal boundaries. It was derived from the place code of death.

Final code list

- 1 = Western Cape
- 2 = Eastern Cape
- 3 = Northern Cape
- 4 = Free State
- 5 = KwaZulu-Natal
- 6 = North West
- 7 = Gauteng
- 8 = Mpumalanga
- 9 = Limpopo
- 96 = Unknown
- 98 = Outside South Africa

Province of usual residence of the deceased (ResProvince)**(@34 2)**

16.	ResProv 1 = Western Cape 2 = Eastern Cape 3 = Northern Cape 4 = Free State 5 = KwaZulu-Natal 6 = North West 7 = Gauteng 8 = Mpumalanga 9 = Limpopo
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Note to users

This variable provides information on the province of usual residence of the deceased based on the 2011 municipal boundaries. It was derived from the place code of usual residence.

Final code list

- 1 = Western Cape
- 2 = Eastern Cape
- 3 = Northern Cape
- 4 = Free State
- 5 = KwaZulu-Natal
- 6 = North West
- 7 = Gauteng
- 8 = Mpumalanga
- 9 = Limpopo
- 99 = Unspecified

Ascertainment of the cause of death (Ascertainment)**(@36 2)**

17.	Ascertainment 1 = Autopsy 2 = Post mortem examination 3 = Opinion of attending medical practitioner 4 = Opinion of attending medical practitioner on duty 5 = Opinion of registered professional nurse 6 = Interview of family member 7 = Other 8 = Autopsy results may be available later 9 = Autopsy not performed
------------	--

Note to users

This variable provides information on the method used to ascertain the cause of death.

Final code list

- 1 = Autopsy

- 2 = Post mortem examination
- 3 = Opinion of attending medical practitioner
- 4 = Opinion of attending medical practitioner on duty
- 5 = Opinion of registered professional nurse
- 6 = Interview of family member
- 7 = Other
- 8 = Autopsy results may be available later
- 9 = Autopsy not performed
- 98 = Unknown
- 99 = Unspecified

Place of death (DeathInst)

(@38 1)

18.	DeathInst
	1 = Hospital
	2 = Emergency room/outpatient
	3 = Dead on arrival
	4 = Nursing home
	5 = Home
	6 = Other

Note to users

This variable provides information on the place or institution at which the person died.

Final code list

- 1 = Hospital
- 2 = Emergency room/outpatient
- 3 = Dead on arrival
- 4 = Nursing home
- 5 = Home
- 6 = Other
- 8 = Unknown
- 9 = Unspecified

Natural/non-natural underlying causes of death (NaturalUnnatural)

(@39 1)

19.	NaturalUnnatural
	1 = Natural underlying cause
	2 = Non-natural underlying cause

Note to users

This variable groups the underlying causes of death into natural and non-natural causes. It is derived from the underlying cause of death.

Final code list

- 1 = Natural underlying cause
- 2 = Non-natural underlying cause

8 = Not applicable

Birth weight in grams (Birthweight) (@40 4)

20.	Birthweight
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Note to users

This variable provides the weight at birth in grams.

Valid ranges: 0–9920

Final code list

9998 = not applicable (individual deaths, i.e. not stillborns).

9999 = unspecified

B. DATES INFORMATION (FACT_MCOD2020_DATES_INFO)

Unique sequence number (SerialNo) (@1 11)

1.	SerialNo
-----------	-----------------

Note to users

This variable is derived from the pasted label automatically created to provide a unique identifier for each death notification form.

Valid range: 19969882401–20200511800

Year of death (DeathYear) (@12 4)

2.	DeathYear
-----------	------------------

Note to users

This variable refers to the year in which the death occurred.

Valid year: 1997–2020

Month of death (DeathMonth) (@16 2)

3.	DeathMonth
	1 = January
	2 = February
	3 = March
	4 = April
	5 = May
	6 = June

	7 = July
	8 = August
	9 = September
	10 = October
	11 = November
	12 = December

Note to users

This variable provides information on the month in which the death occurred.

Final code list

- 1 = January
- 2 = February
- 3 = March
- 4 = April
- 5 = May
- 6 = June
- 7 = July
- 8 = August
- 9 = September
- 10 = October
- 11 = November
- 12 = December

Day of death (DeathDay)

(@18 2)

4.	DeathDay
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Note to users

This variable provides information on the day on which the death occurred.

Valid range: 1–31

Year of birth (BirthYear)

(@20 4)

5.	BirthYear
----	-----------

Note to users

This variable refers to the year in which the death occurred.

Valid year: 1874–2020
9999 = Unspecified

Month of birth (BirthMonth)

(@24 2)

6.	BirthMonth
	1 = January

2	= February
3	= March
4	= April
5	= May
6	= June
7	= July
8	= August
9	= September
10	= October
11	= November
12	= December

Note to users

This variable provides information on the month in which the deceased was born.

Final code list

- 1 = January
- 2 = February
- 3 = March
- 4 = April
- 5 = May
- 6 = June
- 7 = July
- 8 = August
- 9 = September
- 10 = October
- 11 = November
- 12 = December
- 99 = Unspecified

Day of birth (BirthDay)

(@26 2)

7.	BirthDay
----	----------

Note to users

This variable provides information on the day on which the deceased was born.

Final code list**Valid range: 1–31**

- 99 = Unspecified

Year of death registration (RegistrationYear)

(@28 4)

8.	RegistrationYear
----	------------------

Note to users

This variable refers to the year in which a death was registered.

Final code list

Valid range: 1997–2020

9999 = Unspecified

Month of death registration (RegistrationMonth)

(@32 2)

9.	RegistrationMonth 1 = January 2 = February 3 = March 4 = April 5 = May 6 = June 7 = July 8 = August 9 = September 10 = October 11 = November 12 = December
-----------	---

Note to users

This variable refers to the month in which the death was registered.

Final code list

1 = January

2 = February

3 = March

4 = April

5 = May

6 = June

7 = July

8 = August

9 = September

10 = October

11 = November

12 = December

99 = Unspecified

Day of death registration (RegistrationDay)

(@34 2)

10.	RegistrationDay
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Note to users

This variable provides information on the day on which the death was registered.

Final code list

Valid range: 1–31

99 = Unspecified

Year of processing (*ProcessingYear*)

(@36 4)

11.	ProcessingYear
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Note to users

This variable provides the year in which the death notification was received and processed by Statistics South Africa.

Final code list

Valid ranges: 1997–2023

C. CAUSES INFORMATION (FACT_MCOD2020_CAUSES_INFO)

Unique sequence number (*SerialNo*)

(@1 11)

1.	SerialNo
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Note to users

This variable is derived from the pasted label automatically created to provide a unique identifier for each death notification form.

Valid range: 19969882401–20200511800

Immediate cause of death (*CauseA*)

(@12 4)

2.	CauseA (Refer to WHO ICD-10 Version 2016 code list)
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Note to users

This variable provides information on the immediate cause of death.

Injury codes for the immediate cause of death (*InjuryA*)

(@16 4)

3.	InjuryA
----	---------

Note to users

This variable provides information on the injury codes for non-natural causes of death.

111 = Natural cause (no injury code)

Second condition leading to death (CauseB)**(@20 4)**

4.	CauseB (Refer to WHO ICD-10 Version 2016 code list)
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Note to users

This variable provides information on the second condition leading to death.
888 = Second condition leading to death not mentioned.

Injury codes for the second condition leading to death (InjuryB)**(@24 4)**

5.	InjuryB
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Note to users

This variable provides information on the injury codes for non-natural causes of death.
111 = Natural cause (no injury code)
888 = Second condition leading to death not mentioned.

Third condition leading to death (CauseC)**(@28 4)**

6.	CauseC (Refer to WHO ICD-10 Version 2016 code list)
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Note to users

This variable provides information on the third condition leading to death.
888 = Third condition leading to death not mentioned.

Injury codes for the third condition leading to death (InjuryC)**(@32 4)**

7.	InjuryC
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Note to users

This variable provides information on the injury codes for non-natural causes of death.
888 = Third condition leading to death not mentioned.

Fourth condition leading to death (CauseD)**(@36 4)**

8.	CauseD (Refer to WHO ICD-10 Version 2016 code list)
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Note to users

This variable provides information on the fourth condition leading to death.
888 = Fourth condition leading to death not mentioned.

Injury codes for the fourth condition leading to death (InjuryD)**(@40 4)**

9.	InjuryD
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Note to users

This variable provides information on the injury codes for non-natural causes of death.
111 = Natural cause (no injury code)
888 = Fourth condition leading to death not mentioned.

Other conditions leading to death (OtherCause)**(@44 4)**

10.	OtherCause (Refer to WHO ICD-10 Version 2016 code list)
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Note to users

This variable provides information on conditions leading to death provided on the line of part 2 of the death notification form.
888 = First cause of death on part 2 not mentioned.

Injury codes for other conditions leading to death (OtherInjury)**(@48 4)**

11.	OtherInjury
------------	--------------------

Note to users

This variable provides information on the injury codes for non-natural causes of death provided on the line on part 2 of the death notification form.
111 = Natural cause (no injury code)
888 = First cause of death on part 2 not mentioned.

Cause provided on part 2 of the death notification form (Part2Cause)**(@52 4)**

12.	Part2Cause (Refer to WHO ICD-10 Version 2016 code list)
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Note to users

This variable provides information on conditions leading to death provided on the line of part 2 of the death notification form.
888 = First cause of death on part 2 not mentioned.

Injury codes for cause on part 2 (Part2Injury)**(@56 4)**

13.	Part2Injury
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Note to users

This variable provides information on the injury codes for non-natural causes of death provided on the line on part 2 of the death notification form.

111 = Natural cause (no injury code)

888 = First cause of death on part 2 not mentioned.

Underlying cause of death (UnderlyingCause)**(@60 3)**

14.	UnderlyingCause (Refer to WHO ICD-10 Version 2016 code list)
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Note to users

This variable provides information on the underlying cause of death. An underlying cause of death is defined as the disease or injury which initiated the train of morbid events leading directly to death, or the circumstances of the accident or violence which produced the fatal injury.