

Injury-related deaths in BC

Monitoring injury-related deaths in British Columbia (BC) for surveillance purposes primarily relies on two administrative data sources: the BC Coroners Service and the BC Vital Statistics Agency.

BC Coroners Service

The BC Coroners Service investigates deaths that are unnatural, sudden, unexpected, unexplained, or unattended in BC. Natural and expected deaths are not reported to the Coroners Service.

All injury-related deaths fall within the scope of the Coroners Service, including:

- Transport-related deaths
- Poisoning or drug toxicity deaths
- Suicide deaths

Cases may remain open while investigations are ongoing, meaning the cause and manner of death have not yet been finalized. Once investigations are completed and cases are closed, a death certificate is issued and sent to the BC Vital Statistics Agency.

The BC Coroners Service provides [statistical reports](#) based on a live database environment. As a result, data for more recent years may be based on preliminary information and are subject to change until all investigations for that year are completed.

BC Vital Statistics Agency

BC Vital Statistics Agency, captures all registered deaths in the province based on official death certificates. Once a death is certified by a physician or coroner, the record is submitted to Vital Statistics, where it is coded using the International Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, 10th Revision (ICD-10) codes and compiled into the official mortality dataset.

Vital Statistics provides the most complete and standardized source for mortality analysis in BC, including:

- Full population coverage (all deaths)
- Demographic information (age, sex, geography)
- Underlying causes of death coded using ICD-10 classification

However, Vital Statistics data has limitations for injury surveillance:

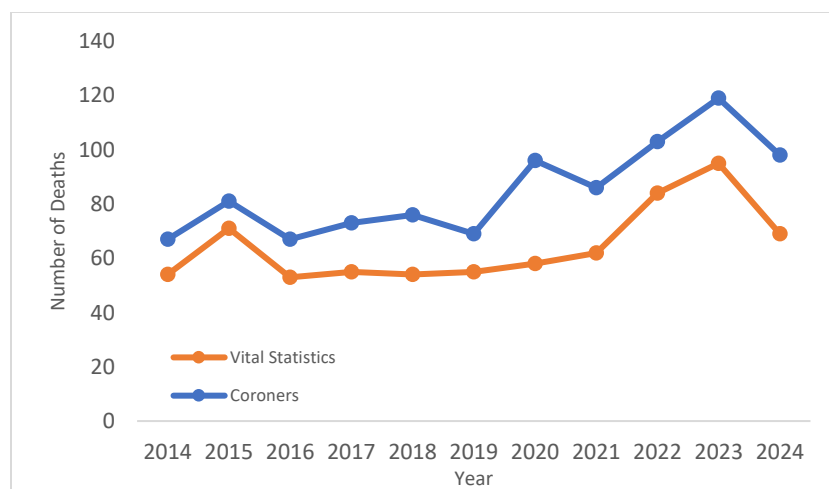
- Time lag: Vital Statistics captures all deaths, but for injury-related cases, the cause of death may not yet be finalized while investigations are ongoing. The time taken to investigate an injury death varies, some taking more than 2 years. In more recent years, since 2018, the underestimation of cause of death counts has been greater compared to previous years.

Comparing BC Coroners Service and BC Vital Statistics Data

The charts below compare injury death counts and trends from BC Vital Statistics and from the statistical reports published by the BC Coroners Service. To support comparability, the following considerations apply:

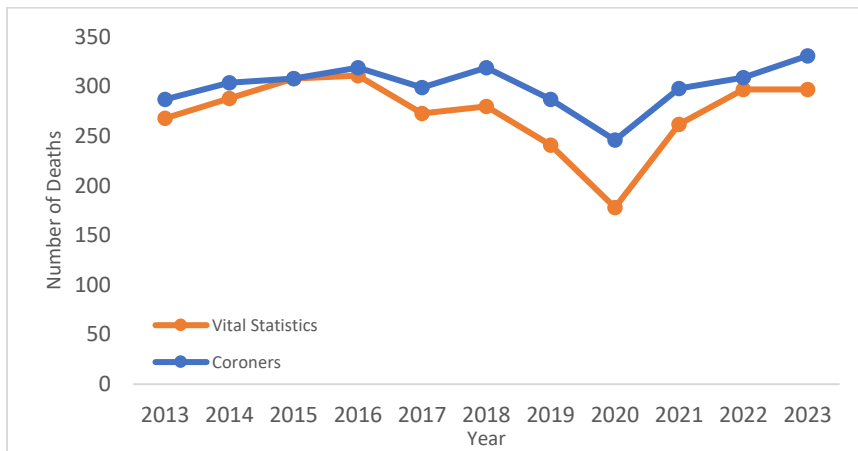
- Both sources include all deaths that occurred in BC, including non-BC residents.
- For each injury cause, the BC Coroners Service statistical report definitions have been matched as closely as possible to the corresponding ICD-10 coded categories in Vital Statistics.
- Statistical reports from BC Coroners Service include causes of deaths that are both confirmed and suspected. Counts by causes of death for recent years may be subject to revision as investigations are completed.
- The Vital Statistics data used in the [Injury Data Online Tool \(IDOT\)](#) includes only deaths where the specified injury is recorded as the underlying cause of death, and does not include deaths where the injury appears only as a contributing cause.
- Differences in classification and coding (e.g., use of underlying cause of death in Vital Statistics versus broader case inclusion in Coroners data) mean that counts may not fully align even after all investigations are complete. That is, when all the cases are closed, BC Coroners Service may show more cases than Vital Statistics. This may be a result of delays in coding. Additionally, the criteria used by BC Coroners Service for including cases may differ from what is captured using by Vital Statistics with the ICD-10 coding structure.

1. Unintentional Drowning Deaths



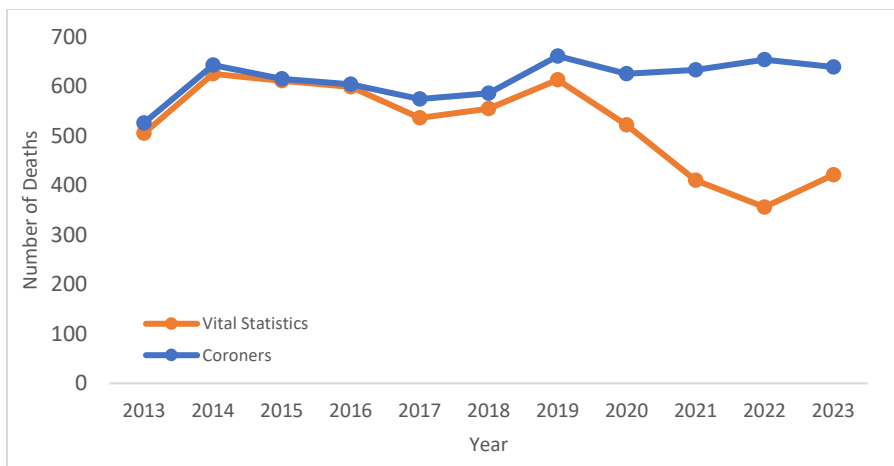
Overall, the BC Coroners Service consistently records more [unintentional drowning deaths](#) than Vital Statistics across most years, though the two sources follow a similar general trend over time. The Coroners data include all deaths where the cause of death was determined to be accidental drowning or where preliminary circumstances indicate accidental drowning.

2. Unintentional Motor Vehicle Traffic Deaths



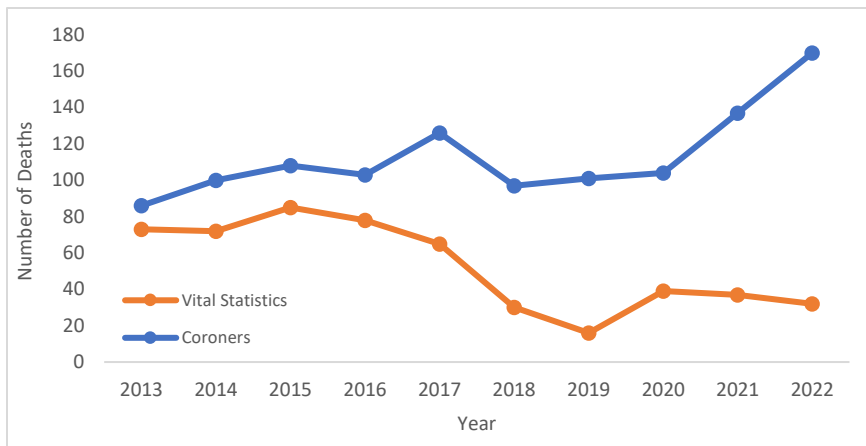
BC Coroners Service data consistently reports higher counts of [unintentional motor vehicle traffic deaths](#) than Vital Statistics, though both sources show similar trends over time. The recent-year differences likely reflect the expected lag in Vital Statistics reporting while collision investigations are being finalized.

3. Suicide Deaths



The Coroners data includes both confirmed and suspected [suicide deaths](#). The gap between the two data sources is more pronounced for suicide deaths, particularly from 2020 onward. During these years, the Coroners Service reports higher counts than Vital Statistics, likely because many recent cases are still under investigation and have not yet been finalized in the Vital Statistics records.

4. Homicide Deaths



For [homicide or suspicious deaths](#), the Coroners Service has recorded higher counts than Vital Statistics since approximately 2017, with the gap widening in more recent years, likely because many recent cases are still under investigation and have not yet been finalized in the Vital Statistics records. Additionally, the inclusion criteria to capture cases may differ.

Conclusion

Across the selected injury causes examined, the BC Coroners Service consistently records higher death counts than BC Vital Statistics, particularly in recent years. This pattern is expected and reflects the time lag in the Vital Statistics data. The magnitude and duration of this gap varies by injury cause, with more complex investigations (such as homicide and suicide) tending to produce larger and longer discrepancies.

Users of iDOT should be aware that injury death counts for the most recent years may underestimate the true burden of injury-related mortality.