Winter Mortality (previously Excess Winter Deaths)

Summary points

- In 2021/22, 13.5% more people in Bristol died in the winter period than the non-winter period, higher than the England average (8.1%).

Factors Influencing Winter Mortality

Winter mortality compares the number of deaths that occurred in the winter period (December to March) with the average of the non-winter periods (the preceding August to November and following April to July). The number of winter deaths depends on the temperature, levels of influenza and other diseases in the population and other factors, such as how well equipped people are to cope with the drop in temperature. Public Health England reports that 21.5% of excess winter deaths are attributable to the coldest 25% of homes and 10% are directly attributable to fuel poverty[1]. Most deaths are due to circulatory and respiratory diseases, and the majority occur amongst people over 75.

Annual Trends

In 2021/22, there were 160 more winter deaths in Bristol compared to non-winter deaths, which is a winter mortality index of 13.5%[2] (Figure 1). This was significantly lower than the winter mortality index of 30% in 2020/21 but higher than the England average of 8.1%.

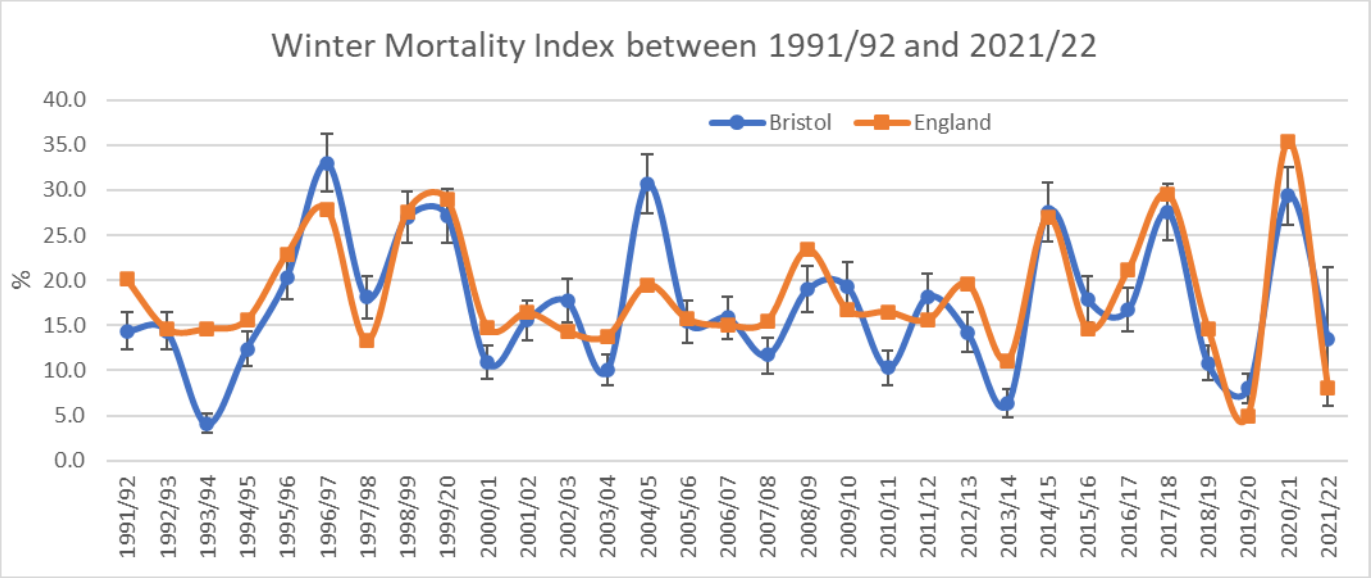

Figure 1: Winter Mortality Index 1991 to 2022. Source: Office for National Statistics – Winter Mortality in England

Covid-19 has had a significant impact on the winter mortality index from 2019/20 onwards with the first wave of deaths experienced in April to June 2020 increasing the non-winter deaths average for 2019/20. 2020/21 was the first year where Covid-19 was present throughout the

[1] www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/355790/Briefing7_Fuel_poverty_health_inequalities.pdf Also see JSNA section Fuel Poverty

[2] Winter mortality index is the excess winter deaths measured as the ratio of extra deaths from all causes that occur in the winter months compared with the expected number of deaths, based on the average of the number of non-winter deaths

whole 12 months so comparison with previous years may not be valid. Data for 2021/22 indicates that there were 13,980 additional winter deaths nationally, a significant decrease on the previous year when over 58,000 additional winter deaths were reported.

Provisional data for 2022/23 will not be published until the summer of 2024. This national statistic is currently being consulted on as part of the wider cross government consultation on health and social care statistical outputs and the publication has been paused until the outcome is known.

Equalities data: National data for 2021/22 shows that of the 13,980 additional winter deaths there were no significant differences to the index average based on the level of deprivation decile lived in or based on sex. Although deprivation data is not available for Bristol in 2021/22 it was possible to identify that similar to the national picture there were no significant differences between the average index and sex.

Prevention

Mortality during winter increases more in England and Wales compared to countries with colder climates, suggesting that many of these deaths could be prevented. Seasonal Flu vaccinations[3] are an important prevention measure for winter mortality, as are seasonal COVID vaccinations for those who are eligible. Keeping warm is essential, and the cost of living crisis will have an impact on winter deaths, not just because people may find it difficult to pay for fuel but also to pay for good, warming food.

Further data / links / consultations:

- Winter mortality in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)
- Office for Health Improvement & Disparities – Excess winter deaths index

Covid-19 impact:

Covid-19 has had a significant impact upon the Winter Mortality Index from 2019/20 onwards as described throughout the report.

Date updated: February 2024 **Next update due**: February 2025

[3] See JSNA section Flu Immunisations