

20 October 2025

Reference: FOI 691 Freedom of Information request

Thank you for your email, dated 22 September 2025. Your request has been handled under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

You asked us:

To provide information on the number of deaths in prison for the last three years that are health-related rather than injury-related and the types of health issues (such as cancer, heart attack, and suicide/mental health).

Our response:

We have searched our records and we hold the requested information.

A copy of the information that you requested is shown below.

From 1 October 2022 to 30 September 2025, the PPO was notified of, and subsequently investigated, 1029 deaths within prisons. These figures reflect the most up-to-date records available at the time of response.

We do not classify deaths as either health-related or injury-related. Instead, we categorise them according to the classifications listed below.

Death category	Number of deaths from 1 October 2022 to 30 September 2025
Awaiting classification	20
Homicide	13
Natural causes	613
Other non-natural	117
Self-inflicted	262
Unascertained	4
Total	1029

Please note that the subcategory for all awaiting classification deaths is other, and the subcategory for all unascertained deaths is not applicable.

Each death within the above classifications is also assigned a subcategory. Those for natural causes can be found in the table below.

Natural causes fatal incidents – subcategories	Number of deaths
Circulatory system (heart)	151
Covid-19	7
Digestive system (stomach, bowels, liver)	24
Diseases of the blood	8
Endocrine, nutritional and metabolic	7
Genitourinary	2
Infections and parasitic diseases	19
Musculoskeletal system	1
Neoplasms (cancer)	211
Nervous system (brain, diseases of the nerves)	35
Other	77
Pregnancy, childbirth and puerperium	2
Respiratory system (lungs)	69
Total	613

You asked us:

How many of these health-related deaths were unexpected?

Our response:

We have searched our records and we hold the requested information.

A copy of the information that you requested is shown below.

For the purposes of this request, we have classified ‘health-related deaths’ as the deaths categorised as natural causes.

Foreseeability of natural causes deaths	Number of deaths from 1 October 2022 to 30 September 2025
Foreseeable fatal incident	377
Unforeseeable / Unclassified fatal incident	236
Total	613

You have the right to appeal against our response if you think it is incorrect. Details can be found in the ‘How to Appeal’ section attached at the end of this letter.

The Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) carries out **independent investigations** into complaints and deaths in custody. The detailed role and responsibilities of the PPO are set out in our office's Terms of Reference. The PPO has three main duties:

- to **investigate complaints** made by prisoners, young people in detention (prisons and secure training centres), offenders under probation supervision and individuals detained under immigration powers (detained individuals)
- to **investigate deaths** of prisoners, young people in detention, approved premises' residents and detained individuals due to any cause, including any apparent suicides and natural causes
- to **investigate deaths of recently released prisoners** that occur within 14 days of release from prison (except homicide)

The purpose of these investigations is **to understand what happened, to correct injustices and to identify learning** for the organisations whose actions we oversee so that the PPO makes a significant contribution to safer, fairer custody and offender supervision.

We may use or share your data only to the necessary extent when conducting our independent investigations in the exercise of our official authority. We will share your data with third parties (e.g. the prison) in order to make sure the information is accurate; to prevent or detect failings; and to identify lessons learnt. We may sometimes need to share your data with third parties if required by law. We only keep your personal data for as long as it is needed, as set out in our data retention policy. If you need any further information about how your data is used, please contact us.

How to Appeal

Internal Review

If you are not satisfied with this response, you have the right to an internal review. The handling of your request will be looked at by someone who was not responsible for the original case, and they will make a decision as to whether we answered your request correctly.

If you would like to request a review, please write or send an email to the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman's office **within two months of the date of this letter**, at the following address:

Prisons and Probation Ombudsman
Third Floor
10 South Colonnade
Canary Wharf
London
E14 4PU
E-mail: Mail@ppo.gov.uk

Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)

If you remain dissatisfied after an internal review decision, you have the right to apply to the Information Commissioner's Office. The Commissioner is an independent regulator who has the power to direct us to respond to your request differently, if he considers that we have handled it incorrectly.

You can contact the ICO at the following address:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

Internet address: <https://ico.org.uk/>