

11 JUL 2013

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Nicolas Bosma  
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Ref: H201302371

Dear Mr Bosma

Your email of 15 June 2013 requesting official information on cannabis deaths was transferred by Births, Deaths and Marriages to the Ministry of Health on 17 June 2013.

In New Zealand, we record the underlying cause of death according to World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines. We have used the Australian Modification of the *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, 10<sup>th</sup> Revision* (ICD-10-AM) coding system since 2000. These underlying cause of death codes are not specific enough to identify cannabis as the underlying cause of death.

The only exception is the code for *Mental and behavioural disorders due to use of cannabinoids* (ICD-10-AM code F12) which is where deaths of people with a history of substance dependence, who die of accidental poisoning, were coded prior to 2006. No deaths with this code as the underlying cause of death have been recorded since 2000.

However, there is some additional information recorded that may be of value. Firstly, we record "Nature of injury" codes which indicate that the person had suffered from that particular injury or poisoning. There is a code for *Toxic effect of Cannabis (derivatives)* (ICD-10-AM code T40.7). This code was present on 19 deaths from 2000 to 2010. There may also have been other substances or circumstances implicated in these deaths. The underlying causes of death for these 19 deaths were as follows:

Underlying cause of death	Number of deaths with a cannabis toxic effect code
Transport accidents (V00-V98)	9
Accidental falls (W00-W19)	1
Accidental poisoning by and exposure to noxious substances (X40-X49)	6
Intentional self-harm (X60-X84)	1
Assault (X85-Y09)	1

Secondly, in 2008 we began recording whether cannabis was documented as being present at death. I would note that this does not necessarily imply a causal relationship between cannabis and death. The following table shows the number of deaths from 2008-2010 where cannabis was documented as present:

<b>Underlying cause of death</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>
E00-E99 Endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases	1		1
F00-F99 Mental and behavioural disorders			2
G00-G99 Diseases of the nervous system		1	
I00-I99 Diseases of the circulatory system	10	11	15
J00-J99 Diseases of the respiratory system	3	1	1
R00-R99 Symptoms, signs and abnormal clinical and laboratory findings, not elsewhere classified			1
V00-V99 Transport accidents	49	46	40
W00-W19 Accidental falls	2	1	1
X40-X49 Accidental poisoning by and exposure to noxious substances	8	12	10
X60-X84 Intentional self-harm	21	34	29
X85-Y09 Assault	5	5	9
Other external cause of mortality	9	13	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>115</b>

Please note that the 2010 data supplied is provisional.

Please note, it is unlikely that the presence of cannabis is systematically enquired into on all deaths. Hence it is difficult to interpret the association of cannabis and deaths, let alone any causal linkage, from the statistics provided.

If you have any queries about this, please direct them to Analytical Services, Ministry of Health. They can be contacted by phone on (04) 496-2000, fax on (04) 816-2898 or by e-mail ([data-enquiries@moh.govt.nz](mailto:data-enquiries@moh.govt.nz)).

You have the right to ask the Ombudsman to investigate and review my decision on this request.

Yours sincerely

  
 Chai Chuah  
**National Director**  
**National Health Board**

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