

Clinically seriously injured (MAIS 3+) road casualties in Northern Ireland, 1999-2021



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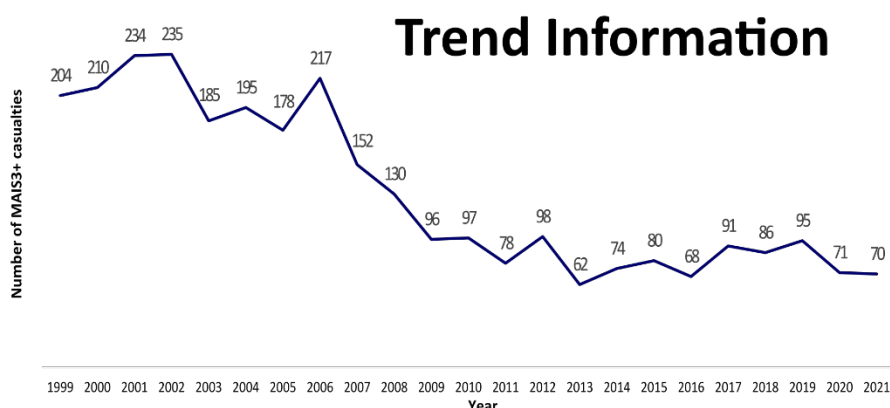
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Key points

- The MAIS3+ peaked in 2002 with 235 serious injury (SI) casualties, after which the numbers began to fall. The most recent five years have shown a levelling off.
- In the latest available year, 2021, there were 70 MAIS3+ casualties – this is a decrease of 70% since the peak in 2002 and a decrease of 1% over the year.
- While the numbers of MAIS3+ casualties are lower than PSNI reported seriously injured, the overall trends are similar: both series have shown a decrease followed by signs of levelling off.
- Males accounted for seven-in-ten (68%) of MAIS3+ casualties in Northern Ireland in the five years from 2017-2021. This is greater than the proportions for male casualties reported in overall hospital admissions (64%) and PSNI serious injuries (66%).
- Almost three-in-ten (27%) of MAIS3+ casualties from 2017-2021 were aged 70 and over. This differs markedly from the age profile of overall hospital admissions for road traffic collisions and PSNI serious injuries, where 14% and 11%, respectively, were in this age band.
- Overall, 10% of hospital admissions for road traffic collisions in the five years 2017-2021 have injuries classified as MAIS3+; however, the proportions differ slightly by road user type, with pedestrians having the greatest proportion of admissions that were MAIS3+ (12%) and pedal cyclists the fewest (8%).
- Comparing the number of hospital admissions to police reported serious injuries we see that a significant proportion (28% over the 22 years 1999-2021) of SI casualties are not known to the police. This under reporting issue has been noted across many jurisdictions including Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland.



There were 70 MAIS 3+ road traffic casualties admitted to hospital in 2021.

The historic downward trend shows signs of levelling off in recent years.

Gender

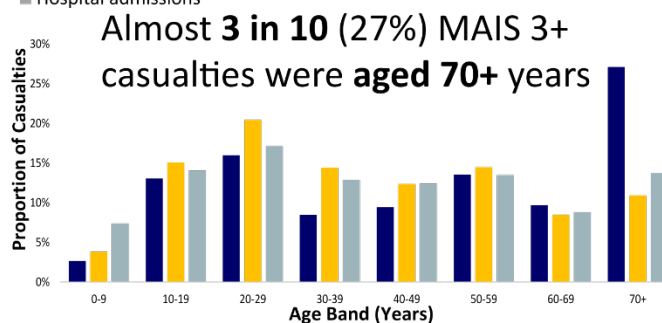


In 2017-2021 nearly **7 in 10** (68%) MAIS 3+ casualties were **male**

This compares with 66% of hospital admissions and 64% of PSNI reported serious injuries.

Age

■ MAIS3+
■ PSNI SIs
■ Hospital admissions



This compares with 14% of hospital admissions and 11% of PSNI reported serious injuries during the same period (2017-2021).

Road User Type

MAIS3+



PSNI SIs



Vulnerable road users made up a greater proportion of MAIS 3+ casualties than they did of PSNI reported SIs in 2017-2021.

In 2017-2021, **11% of hospital admissions** for road traffic collisions were seriously injured based on the **MAIS 3+** definition.

In 2017-2021, **MAIS 3+** casualties accounted for 11% of **PSNI reported serious injuries**.

Introduction:

Clinically seriously injured (MAIS3+) road casualties in Northern Ireland, 1999-2020

The Abbreviated Injury Scale (AIS) is a clinical measure used to classify and describe the severity of injuries; it represents the threat to life associated with the injury. A score of 1 indicates a minor injury, while 6 refers to an unsurvivable injury. A casualty that sustains an injury with a score of 3 or higher on the AIS is classified as clinically seriously injured (MAIS 3+).

AIS Code	Injury	Example
1	Minor	Superficial laceration
2	Moderate	Fractured sternum
3	Serious	Open fracture of humerus
4	Severe	Perforated trachea
5	Critical	Ruptured liver
6	Unsurvivable	Total severance of the aorta
9	Not Known	

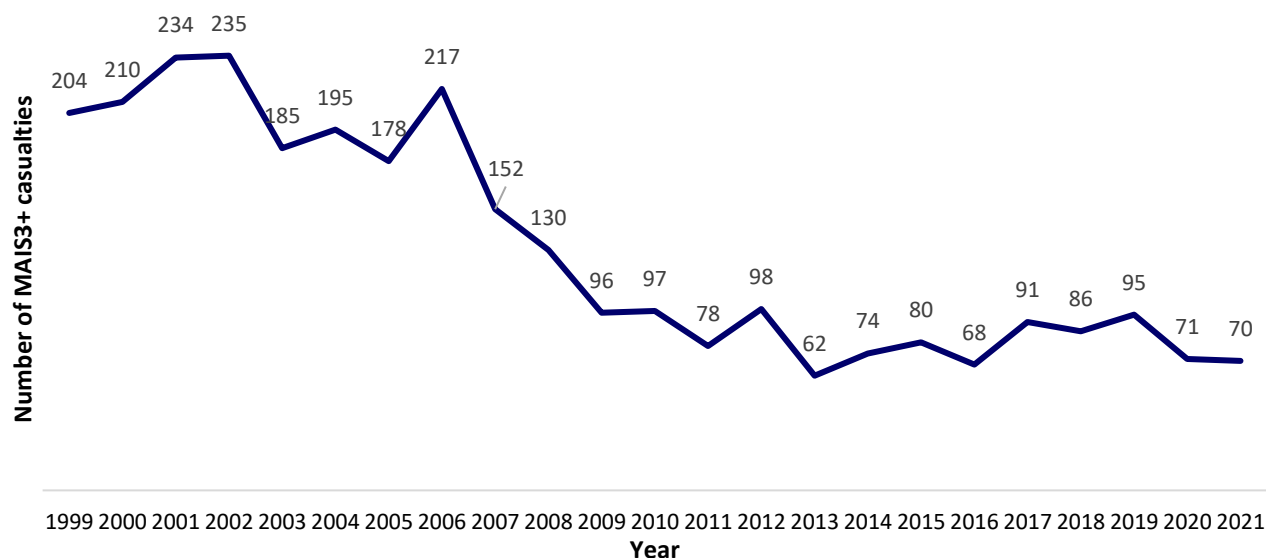
This is the seventh report in the series and presents the 2021 update. The MAIS 3+ data in this report are produced using casualty admissions to hospitals in Northern Ireland between 1999 and 2021 with a clinically defined serious injury following a road traffic collision. See methodology on page 16 for further detail.

What is the need for MAIS3+?

The current reporting of serious injuries is derived from PSNI data. It is based on the judgement of the reporting police officer, following defined guidelines, rather than on medical expertise. The main limitation is the extent to which PSNI data represents the true level of collisions that occur; research carried out suggests that a considerable proportion of non-fatal casualties in Great Britain (and by extension in Northern Ireland) are not known to the police. The PSNI data are directly comparable with Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland but are not generally considered comparable with other international jurisdictions due to significant differences in the grading of severity of injury which can be applied. Reporting serious injury casualties using MAIS 3+ will therefore provide a more accurate, clinical definition of serious injury, while simultaneously correcting for the underreporting of police data and international definitional differences. It is the definition of road traffic serious injury currently recommended by the European Union but, it should be stressed again, is at a much higher severity threshold than the existing PSNI definition.

MAIS 3+ in Northern Ireland

Chart 1: MAIS 3+ road casualties in Northern Ireland, 1999-2021

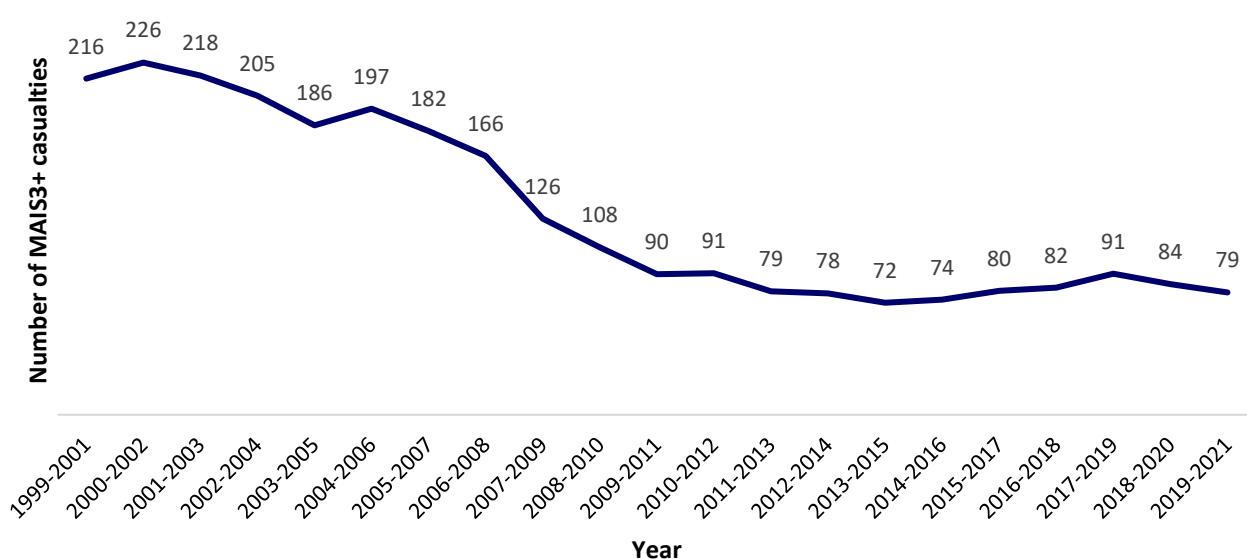


NB: A single patient may have more than one admission of care arising from a single collision; however, the number of such cases is expected to be very small.

Chart 1 above shows the number of clinically seriously injured (MAIS 3+) road casualties in Northern Ireland from 1999 to 2021. The series peaked in 2002 with 235 serious injury (SI) casualties, after which numbers began to fall (with a temporary rise in 2006). Looking at the most recent years, there is evidence that the historic downward trend may now be levelling off; there was a peak of 98 clinical SIs in 2012, followed by a sharp decrease of over one-third (37%) to 62 in 2013, the series low. In the latest available year, 2021, there were 70 MAIS 3+ casualties – a decrease of 1% on the previous year.

There has been considerable variability year-on-year across the period, although this is to be expected given the relatively small number of admissions in Northern Ireland that meet the higher MAIS 3+ severity threshold. For this reason, the smoothed trend is presented below.

Chart 2: MAIS 3+ road casualties in Northern Ireland, 1999-2021 (3-Year Rolling Average)



The rolling average in Chart 2 shows more clearly the downward trend and levelling off. In the time period examined, the SIs reached their highest level in the period 2000-02 (average SIs = 226), after which the numbers started to fall. The temporary rise in 2006 is, however, still evident. The latest 3 years, 2019-2021 had an average number of 79 SIs, a reduction of nearly two-thirds (65%) on the series peak; however, the figure is up 9% since the low of 2013-2015. The smoothed trend, which showed large reductions earlier in the series, began to show a slower rate of reduction from 2010 onwards. More recently, there has been a slight increase in the number of MAIS 3+ casualties, but both the 2018-2020 and 2019-2021 figures showed a fall in numbers.

MAIS 3+ compared with police-reported data

Table 1: Admissions to hospital for road traffic collisions and PSNI reported Serious Injuries in Northern Ireland, 1999-2021

Year of admission	Number of admissions*	MAIS3+	MAIS3+/ Admissions	PSNI Serious Injuries	MAIS3+ /PSNI SIs	PSNI SIs/ Admissions
1999	2,429	204	8%	1,509	14%	62%
2000	2,409	210	9%	1,786	12%	74%
2001	2,405	234	10%	1,682	14%	70%
2002	2,290	235	10%	1,526	15%	67%
2003	1,865	185	10%	1,288	14%	69%
2004	1,833	195	11%	1,183	16%	65%
2005	1,695	178	11%	1,073	17%	63%
2006	1,751	217	12%	1,211	18%	69%
2007	1,687	152	9%	1,097	14%	65%
2008	1,440	130	9%	990	13%	69%
2009	1,355	96	7%	1,035	9%	76%
2010	1,130	97	9%	892	11%	79%
2011	978	78	8%	825	9%	84%
2012	1,030	98	10%	795	12%	77%
2013	1,026	62	6%	720	9%	70%
2014	989	74	7%	710	10%	72%
2015	986	80	8%	711	11%	72%
2016	924	68	7%	828	8%	90%
2017	908	91	10%	778	12%	86%
2018	872	86	10%	730	12%	84%
2019	870	95	11%	774	12%	89%
2020	584	71	12%	596	12%	102%
2021	616	70	11%	809	9%	131%
1999-2021	32,072	3,006	9%	23,548	13%	73%
2017-2021	3,850	413	11%	3,687	11%	96%

* A single patient may have more than one admission of care arising from a single collision; however, the number of such cases is expected to be very small.

Of the 32,072 hospital admissions in Northern Ireland for road traffic collisions between 1999 and 2021, only 3,006 (9%) were considered to be seriously injured based on the MAIS 3+ definition. In the most recent five years, 2017-2021, it was 11%. It should be noted that the MAIS score was unknown in 14% of cases, so the true number of admissions with a MAIS 3+ may be significantly higher. See table 1 above.

The number of MAIS 3+ casualties in Northern Ireland is much lower than the number of seriously injured casualties reported by PSNI; over the 23 year period 1999-2021 the numbers of MAIS 3+ casualties accounted for 13% of PSNI serious injuries (see table 1). In 2017-2021, this reduces to 11%. This reflects the higher severity threshold for a serious injury on the MAIS scale offset, to a certain extent, by the PSNI under-reporting issue.

In general, PSNI defines a serious injury¹ as one for which a person is detained in hospital as an 'in-patient' or if they have one or more injuries from a predefined list. Since 1999, the total amount of PSNI SIs was 23,548, and by contrast, admissions to hospital for road traffic collisions in the same period was 32,072. This highlights the fact (mentioned previously) that there is a significant proportion (around three-tenths) of SI casualties not known to the police. This under-reporting issue has been noted across many jurisdictions including Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland. The most recent year has shown the highest level of reporting, indeed for only the second time there were more PSNI SIs than hospital admissions, with PSNI SIs being 31% higher than hospital admissions.

Chart 3: MAIS 3+ casualties following a road traffic collision and PSNI reported Serious Injuries, Northern Ireland 1999-2021

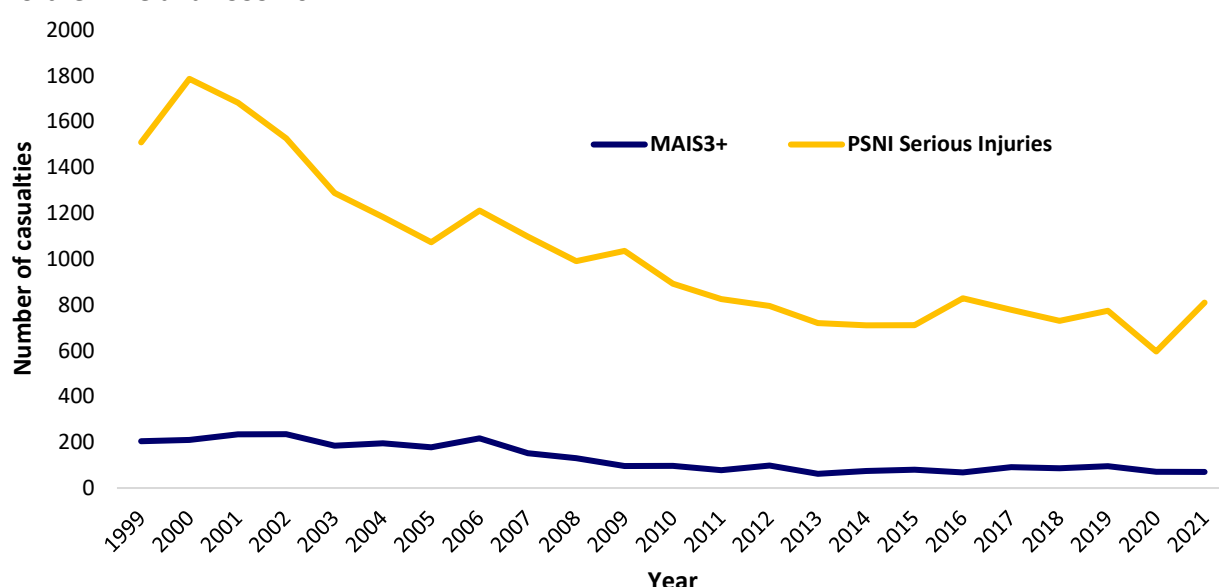
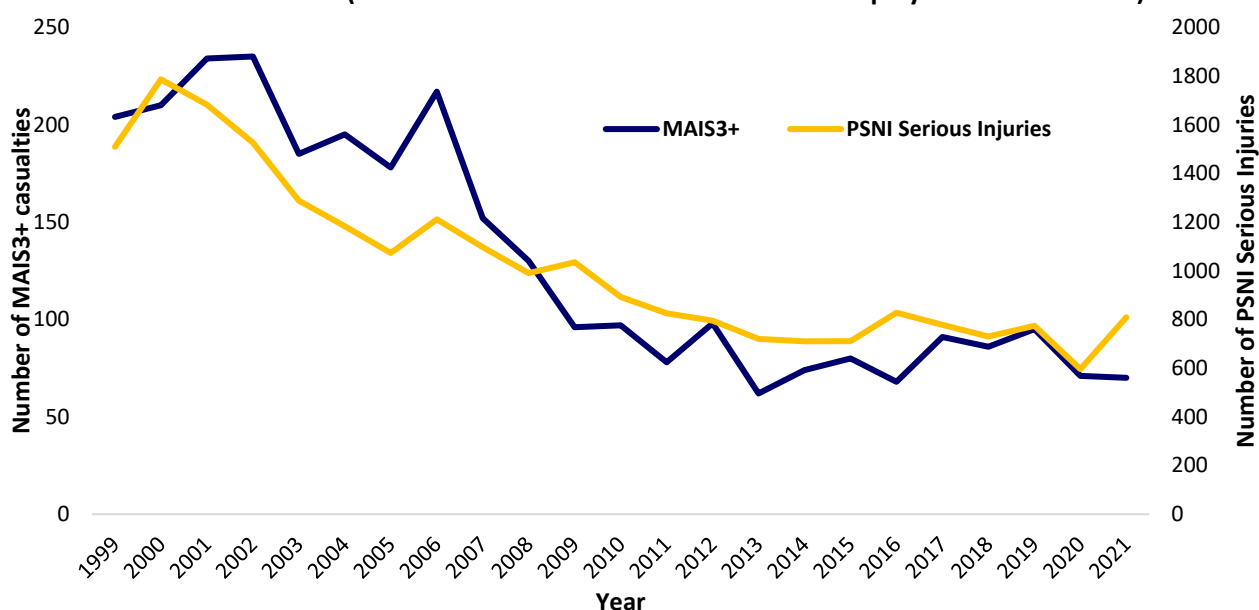


Chart 4: MAIS 3+ casualties following a road traffic collision and PSNI reported Serious Injuries, Northern Ireland 1999-2021 (Alternate Version – MAIS 3+ Casualties displayed on second axis)



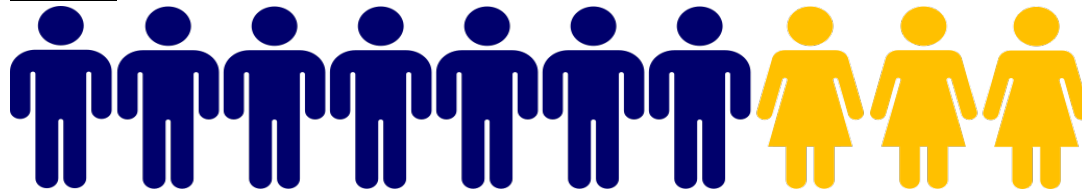
¹ Full PSNI definition of serious injury: an injury for which a person is detained in hospital as an 'in-patient', or any of the following injuries whether or not the person is detained in hospital: fractures, concussion, internal injuries, crushing's, burns, severe cuts and lacerations or severe general shock requiring medical treatment.

Charts 3 and 4 show the PSNI SIs and MAIS 3+ casualty numbers; in chart 4, the overall trends can be better compared. Notwithstanding the difference in the levels of SIs reported by each definition, it is noteworthy that both series have shown an historic decrease followed by signs of levelling off in recent years. The decrease of 178 PSNI Serious Injuries in 2020 was followed by an increase of 213 in 2021. The large peak seen in MAIS 3+ casualties in 2006 was echoed in the PSNI data; however, the greater variability associated with the much smaller numbers of MAIS 3+ casualties mean its peak is more pronounced.

Analysis of MAIS 3+ casualties

The following analysis, looks at MAIS 3+ casualties in the last 5-year period (2017 – 2021).

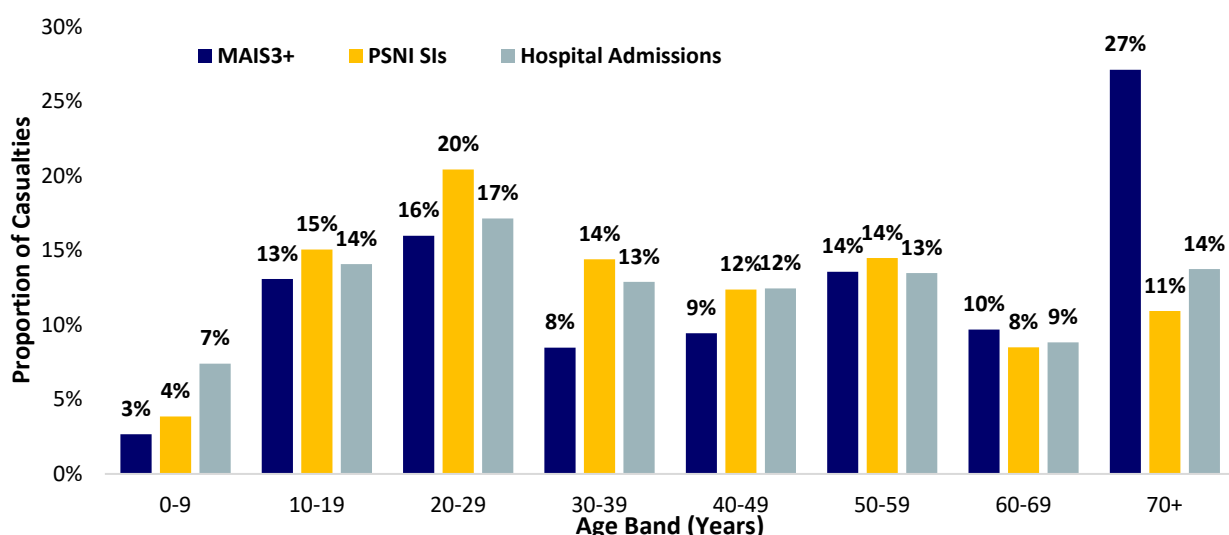
Gender



Males accounted for nearly seven-tenths (68%) of the total MAIS 3+ casualties in Northern Ireland in the five years from 2017 to 2021. This is greater than the proportions of male casualties reported in overall hospital admissions (66%) and PSNI serious injuries (64%).

Age

Chart 5: Proportion of Casualties by age², Northern Ireland 2017-2021

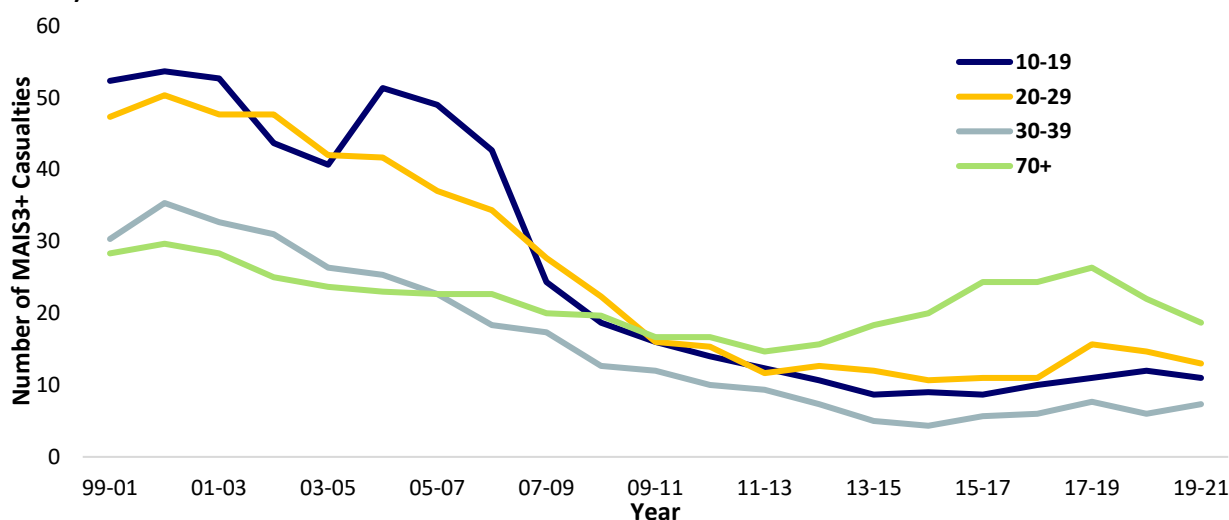


Over a quarter (27%) MAIS 3+ casualties from 2017-2021 were aged 70 and over. This differs markedly from the age profile of overall hospital admissions for road traffic collisions and PSNI serious injuries, where 14% and 11%, respectively, were in this age band. The high proportion of MAIS 3+ casualties which were aged 70 and over is perhaps not surprising given people in this age band are likely to be more vulnerable than those who are younger, and you may expect an older person would suffer more serious injuries if in a collision.

When looking at the full trend of available data (1999-2021 for hospital admissions; 2002-2021 for PSNI SIs), the proportions for all casualties are lower, with 17% of MAIS 3+ casualties falling within the 70+ category, compared with 9% for both hospital admissions and 8% for PSNI SIs. The greater differences observed more recently is largely a result of decreases in the number of MAIS3+ casualties aged 10-39 alongside increases in numbers for those aged 70+ – see Chart 6 below.

² For MAIS3+ casualties and hospital admissions, this refers to the age at the start of the admission; for PSNI serious injuries it is the age at time of collision.

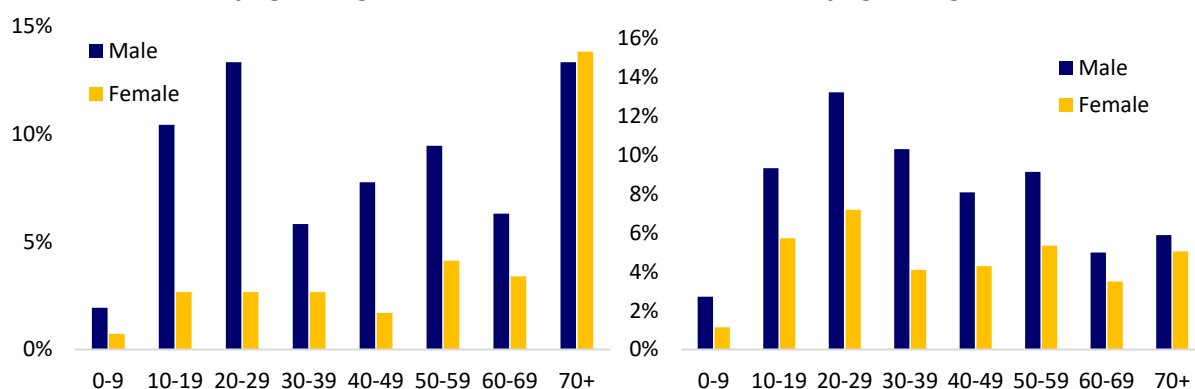
Chart 6: MAIS 3+ casualties by age at start of admission, Northern Ireland 1999-2021 (Selected age bands)



At the start of the reporting period, the numbers of MAIS 3+ casualties aged 10-29 were much greater than of those aged 70+, while those aged 30-39 were just slightly above. All four groups have seen a decline over the time series; however, the number of older person casualties did not fall to the same extent as numbers in other age groups, and in more recent years they have started to increase to 2019, with falls in 2020 and 2021. The result is that numbers of casualties aged 70+ are now greater than those in the younger three groups. It is interesting to note that the large spike in casualty numbers mentioned previously, which appeared in 2006, was caused by the 'Aged 10-19' group. Additionally, the increase in MAIS3+ casualties from 2018 to 2019 are largely explained by increases in MAIS 3+ casualties in the 'Aged 20 to 29' group (numbers in this category have risen by 6 - from 14 to 20, or 43%) and in the 'Aged 30-39' group (numbers have increased by 5 – from 5 to 10, or 100%).

Looking at both age and gender, females aged 70+ accounted for the greatest proportion of overall MAIS 3+ casualties in 2017-2021 (14%); however, the proportions reported in the other age/gender categories were not far behind – 13% of MAIS 3+ casualties were males aged 70+ as well as 13% being males aged 20-29. The PSNI trend is very different – there we see young male casualties are the most frequently reported (13% aged 20-29), with far fewer in other age categories. In both trends, we see that the proportion of male casualties far exceeds females for the younger age groups; however, there is a large spike in MAIS3+ females aged 70+ that is not seen in the PSNI data. See charts 7 and 8 below.

Chart 7: MAIS 3+ by age and gender, 2017-2021 **Chart 8: PSNI SIs by age and gender, 2017-2021**



Road user type

Chart 9: MAIS 3+ casualties compared with PSNI reported seriously injured casualties, by road user type, Northern Ireland 2017-2021

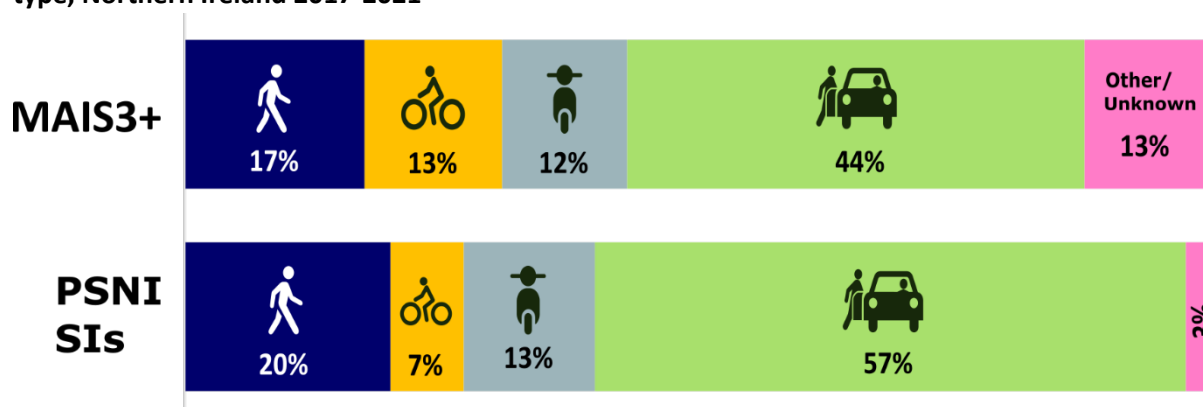


Chart 9 above shows a comparison of MAIS 3+ casualties with PSNI serious injury casualties, by road user type, over the period 2017-2021. As expected, the most frequently recorded road user type of the MAIS 3+ casualties was car (44%). However, the equivalent proportion of PSNI Serious Injuries is 57%. Therefore, the numbers of casualties that were travelling by the more vulnerable modes (pedestrian, motorcycle and pedal cycle) made up a greater proportion of the MAIS 3+ total than they did of the PSNI SIs (43% compared with 40%, respectively). Like the over-representation of older people in the MAIS 3+ numbers, this again is not surprising: you might expect that a motorcyclist or cyclist, for example, would suffer injuries at the more severe end of the scale if in a collision than someone travelling by car. However, it should also be noted that research conducted in Great Britain has shown that there is significant under reporting of non-fatal pedal cyclist casualties in police data and it would not be unreasonable to assume this would also be the case in Northern Ireland, and which may also help to explain at least part of the difference.

Chart 10: Admissions to hospital for road traffic collisions by road user type and severity, Northern Ireland 2017-2021

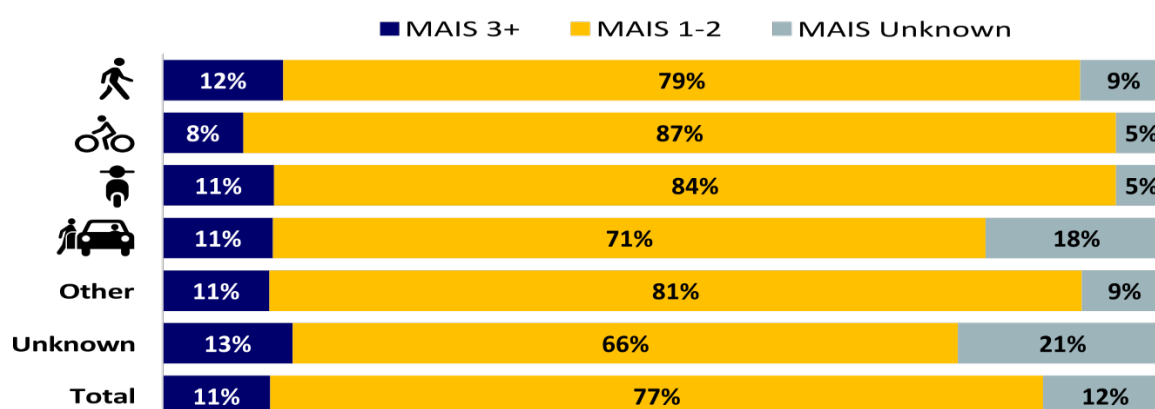


Chart 10 above shows the admissions to hospital in Northern Ireland for road traffic collisions, split by road user type and severity of injury. Of the admissions between 2017 to 2021, 11% were MAIS 3+, 77% had a MAIS score of 1 or 2 with the remaining 12% having unknown MAIS. This differs slightly by road user type, with pedestrians having the greatest proportion of admissions that were MAIS 3+ (12%) and pedal cyclists the fewest (8%). This analysis, however,

is somewhat confounded by the high percentage of unknowns across the various road user categories; in particular car user admissions, where 18% were unclassified, over double the proportion of the more vulnerable road user groups. It is currently unclear why such a high proportion of car user admissions have been unable to be classified by the MAIS 3+ measure.

Chart 11: Number of MAIS 3+ casualties by road user type, Northern Ireland 2017-2021

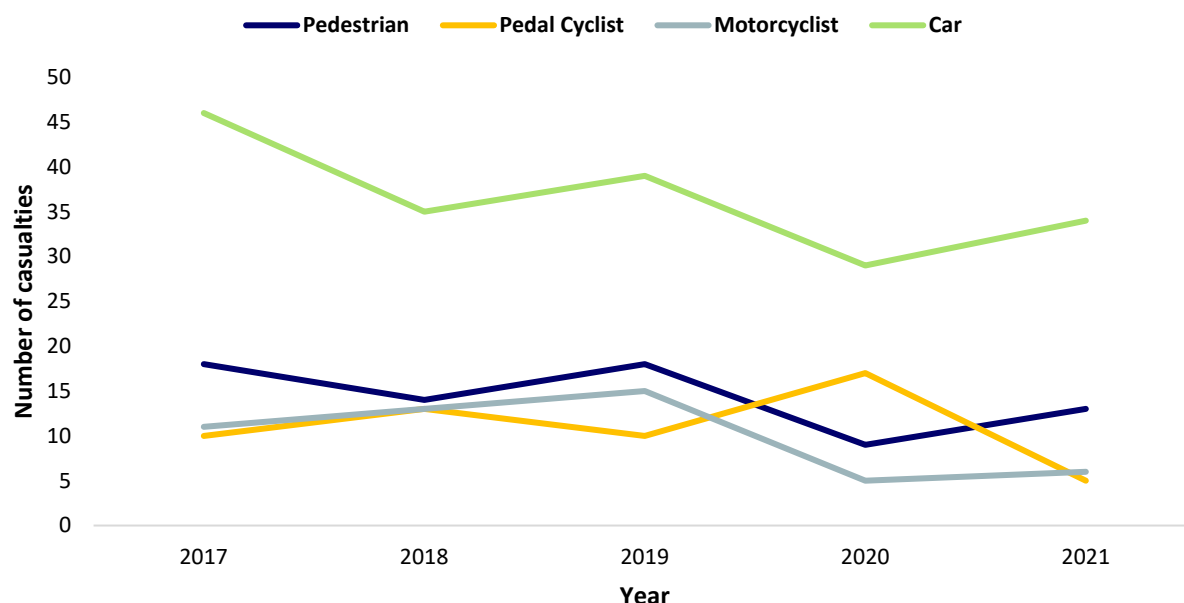
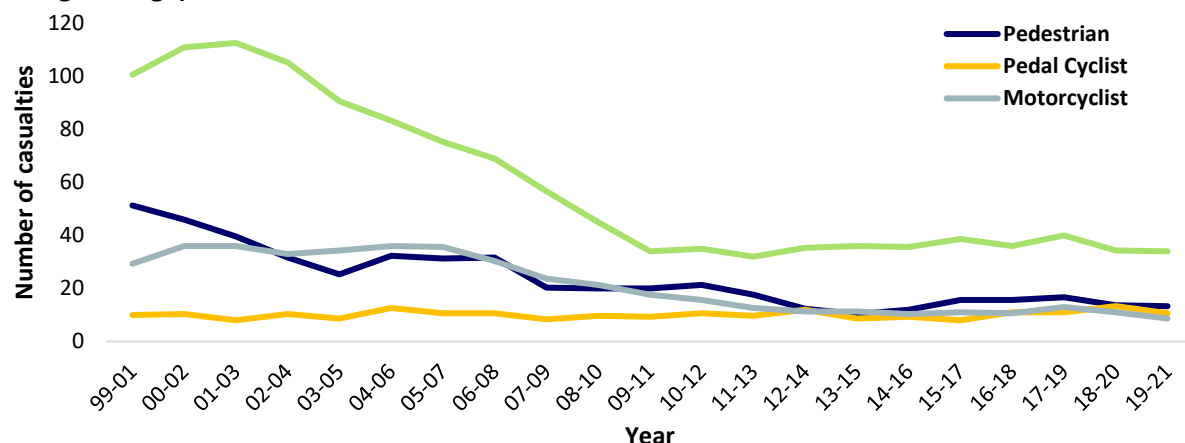


Chart 12: Number of MAIS 3+ casualties by road user type, Northern Ireland 1999-2021 (3-Year Rolling Average)



When looking at the number of MAIS 3+ casualties by road user type for the most recent five years, it's clear that each series experiences year-on-year volatility exacerbated by the small numbers in these sub-groups. For that reason, the rolling average chart (Chart 12) has been included to give a clearer indication of which direction the trends are moving. The smoothed trend would suggest there has been little change over the years to Pedal Cyclist MAIS 3+ casualties (the moving average tends to regress to a mean of 10 casualties); however, this must be seen in light of an increased level of cycling over largely the same time period (average miles cycled per person per year in Northern Ireland has doubled over the last 15 years from 17 miles in 2002-2004 to 34 miles in 2017-2019). The three other main road user types have all experienced varying degrees of decline. Car User numbers have experienced the greatest decrease, from 113 casualties, on average in 2001-03, to 34 in 2019-21.

Comparison with England

Table 2: Comparison of Northern Ireland road traffic casualties with England, 1999-2021

Year of Admission	MAIS3+/ Police SIs NI	MAIS3+/ Police SIs ENG	Police SIs / Admissions NI	Police SIs / Admissions ENG	MAIS3+ / Admissions NI	MAIS3+ / Admissions ENG
1999	14%	12%	62%	95%	8%	11%
2000	12%	12%	74%	95%	9%	12%
2001	14%	13%	70%	94%	10%	12%
2002	15%	13%	67%	92%	10%	12%
2003	14%	15%	69%	82%	10%	12%
2004	16%	16%	65%	74%	11%	12%
2005	17%	17%	63%	65%	11%	11%
2006	18%	18%	69%	66%	12%	12%
2007	14%	19%	65%	65%	9%	12%
2008	13%	19%	69%	62%	9%	12%
2009	9%	21%	76%	58%	7%	12%
2010	11%	21%	79%	57%	9%	12%
2011	9%	22%	84%	57%	8%	12%
2012	12%	23%	77%	59%	10%	13%
2013	9%	25%	70%	56%	6%	14%
2014	10%	26%	72%	56%	7%	14%
2015	11%	28%	72%	55%	8%	15%
2016	8%	28%	90%	59%	7%	16%
2017	12%	26%	86%	65%	10%	17%
2018	12%	25%	84%	67%	10%	17%
2019	12%	26%	89%	67%	11%	17%
2020	12%	28%	102%	65%	12%	18%
2021	9%		131%		11%	
Overall	13%	20%	73%	69%	9%	13%
Most recent five years	11%	26%	96%	65%	11%	17%

Notes:

¹England Hospital admission data for road casualties is currently only available up to 2020.

²There are no estimates of MAIS3+ casualties in England after 2020.

³Most recent five years: 2017-2021 in Northern Ireland; 2016-2020 for England.

As stated previously, over the 23-year period 1999-2021, the numbers of MAIS 3+ casualties in Northern Ireland accounted for 13% of PSNI serious injuries. By comparison, the equivalent proportion in England was greater, at 20% (see table 2 above). This difference is greater still if considering the most recent five years of available data – 11% in Northern Ireland in 2017-2021 compared with 26% in England in 2016-2020. The number of MAIS 3+ casualties is much lower than the number of seriously injured casualties recorded by police because MAIS 3+ captures more severe injuries than the definition of serious injury in police reported data; however, it was at first surprising that the proportion was that much smaller in Northern Ireland (less than half the level in England in the most recent five years). Further investigation was carried out to determine whether this variation could be explained, with focus first on how representative police serious injuries were of the true level of collisions that occurred.

Hospital admissions data in England are currently only available up to 2020, however data for 1999 to 2020 shows that police serious injuries accounted for 69% of overall admissions. By comparison, the equivalent figure (1999-2021) in Northern Ireland was 73%, which would seem to indicate that a

broadly similar level of underreporting is present in both jurisdictions across the full period. See table 2 above. However, splitting the time series, we can see that under-reporting of serious injuries in police data is an increasing problem for England (Police SIs/Admissions averaged 92% in 1999-2003, falling to 65% in 2016-2020). By comparison, the trend in Northern Ireland has been much more stable, and actually shows an increase over the years (in 1999-2003, an average of 68% of hospital admissions were accounted for by PSNI numbers, rising to 96% in 2017-2021).

If we next examine hospital admissions, we see that from 1999-2021, MAIS 3+ casualties account for 9% of road casualty hospital admissions in Northern Ireland, while the equivalent figure is 13% in England (1999-2020). See table 2 above. Therefore, it looks to be the case that fewer casualties in Northern Ireland have the most severe injuries, and the question must be asked as to why this may be so. A possible reason is discussed below.

Chart 13: Police recorded road traffic serious injury casualties by road user type in Northern Ireland and England, most recent five years.

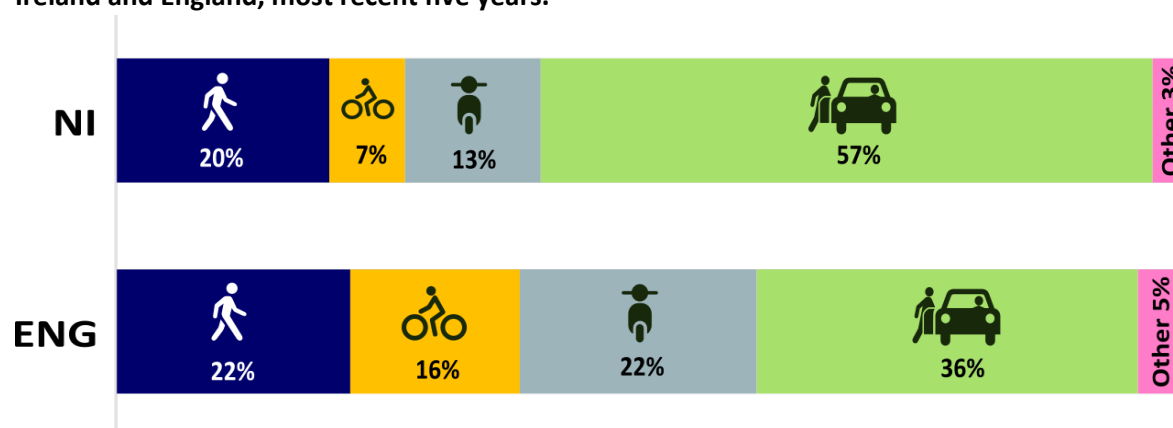


Chart 13 above shows the police reported serious injury road traffic casualties by road user type in Northern Ireland and England for the most recent five years. The most frequently reported road user type was car in both Northern Ireland and England; however, the proportion varied greatly between the two jurisdictions (57% in Northern Ireland compared with 36% in England). Therefore, the numbers of casualties that were travelling by the more vulnerable modes (pedestrian, motorcycle and pedal cycle) made up a smaller proportion of the police serious injury casualty total in Northern Ireland than they did in England (40% compared with 60%, respectively). This road user profile may therefore offer an explanation as to why there were fewer casualties in Northern Ireland that have the most severe MAIS 3+ injuries: with a smaller proportion of vulnerable road users reported in police serious injury casualties here, and based on the assumption that vulnerable road users are more likely to suffer the most serious injuries if in a collision, it would follow that Northern Ireland has a smaller proportion of MAIS 3+ casualties in hospital.

To conclude, comparing Northern Ireland road traffic casualties with England from 1999-2021, we see that MAIS 3+ casualties in Northern Ireland account for a smaller proportion of police reported seriously injured than in England. Examining the available data to try and explain this difference leads us to two possible reasons: firstly, there appears to be greater underreporting of police serious injuries in England than in Northern Ireland; and secondly, the profile of the road user type differs across the two jurisdictions, with a smaller proportion of vulnerable road users in the Northern Ireland police data being reflected in fewer MAIS 3+ hospital admissions here.

Methodology

The AIS

When a patient is admitted to hospital, clinical details of their conditions are coded to the International Classification of Diseases 10th revision (ICD-10)³. A standard look-up table has been developed by the European Commission to convert the ICD-10 diagnostic codes of road traffic related hospital admissions to the Abbreviated Injury Scale (AIS). This then provides for international comparisons of road traffic serious injuries on a consistent basis.

The AIS severity score is an ordinal scale of 1 to 6 (1 indicating a minor injury and 6 being unsurvivable) developed by the Association for the Advancement of Automotive Medicine (see table below). An admission to hospital may have a number of different injuries, with differing severities. The Maximum Abbreviated Injury Scale (MAIS) is therefore the AIS score of the most severe injury that a patient sustains; if a patient has one injury with an AIS score of 2 (moderate) and another with AIS of 4 (severe) then their MAIS score is 4. Patients with a MAIS of 3 or above (MAIS 3+) are considered to be clinically seriously injured.

Abbreviated Injury Scale

AIS-CODE	INJURY	EXAMPLE
1	Minor	Superficial laceration
2	Moderate	Fractured sternum
3	Serious	Open fracture of humerus
4	Severe	Perforated trachea
5	Critical	Ruptured liver with tissue loss
6	Unsurvivable	Total severance of aorta
9	Not known	

Producing the MAIS 3+ numbers used in this report

In addition to providing details of the injuries sustained, the ICD-10 codes also provide information on how a patient's injuries were caused. Hospital patients who have an external cause of injury relating to a road transport collision (codes V01 to V89, excluding V81) were extracted from the hospital admissions inpatient database over 1999 to 2020. Only casualties whose injuries related to collisions that occurred on a public highway (i.e. road traffic collisions) were included. Each admission was therefore assigned to a MAIS category as follows:

- MAIS 3+ if any of the patient's codes were AIS 3 or above
- MAIS<3 if all of the patient's codes were AIS1-2
- Unknown if all of the patient's codes were unknown
- Unknown if none of the patient's codes were AIS 3 or above and at least one code was unknown

³ For more information on ICD-10 see [International classification of diseases](#)