

# REPORT ON WEEKLY DEATHS IN SOUTH AFRICA

23 – 29 JAN 2022

(WEEK 4)

Debbie Bradshaw, Ria Laubscher,  
Rob Dorrington, Pam Groenewald, Tom Moultrie

Burden of Disease Research Unit  
South African Medical Research Council  
1 February 2022



UCT Centre  
for Actuarial  
Research

## Glossary:

**Age-standardised excess death rate:** Indirectly age-standardised excess death rates have been calculated for each province to adjust the crude death rates per capita for the differences in distribution of the population by age. The adjustment factor for each province is calculated as the crude death rate for South Africa divided by what the crude rate for South Africa would have been had the age distribution of the population been that of the province. Standardisation for age is necessary when comparing populations that differ in their age structure because age has a powerful influence on the risk of dying. The rate is based on the cumulative number of excess deaths since 3 May 2020 to date divided by the population estimate for 2021 and has not been annualised.

**Actual number of deaths:** The actual number of deaths in South Africa have been estimated from the numbers recorded on the National Population Register using weighting factors set to produce results consistent with those of the annual Rapid Mortality Surveillance Report to account for deaths of persons who are not on the National Population Register as well as those that have not been registered with the Department of Home Affairs. **The adjustments to account for incompleteness of recording of deaths on the NPR have been re-estimated for the 2021 reports taking into account the 2017 cause-of-death data released by Stats SA in 2020.** A methodological note briefly outlining the changes can be downloaded with this report from the SAMRC website: <https://www.samrc.ac.za/reports/report-weekly-deaths-south-africa>.

**Epi-week:** The Weekly Death Reports in 2020 used weeks from 1 January and ran from Wednesday to Tuesday. In setting up the monitoring for 2021, we recast the data to report by an 'Epi-week' consistent with CDC and many NICD reports which run from Sunday to Saturday, ensuring continuity of weeks from one year to the next. Each week is aligned with the 'Epi-year' that has 4 or more days in that week. Week 53 of 2020 is from 27 December 2020 to 2 January 2021, Week 1 of 2021 is 3 January – 9 January 2021 and Week 1 of 2022 is 2 January – 8 January 2022.

**Excess deaths:** There is no universal definition of, or understanding of what is meant by, "excess mortality". It is a term used in epidemiology and public health that refers to the number of deaths that are occurring above what we would normally expect. The WHO uses the term to describe "Mortality above what would be expected based on the non-crisis mortality rate in the population of interest. Excess mortality is thus mortality that is attributable to the crisis conditions. It can be expressed as a rate (the difference between observed and non-crisis mortality rates), or as a total number of excess deaths."

**Excess natural deaths associated with COVID-19:** Generally, the number of excess deaths per week is calculated as the number of all-cause deaths in that week less the number that might be assumed to have occurred had there not been the epidemic (i.e. the counterfactual number), provided that the counterfactual is lower. However, this approach has generally only been applied to countries where deaths have been tracking the counterfactual before the onset of significant numbers of COVID-19 related deaths. The method provides a poor estimate of the numbers of COVID-19 and collateral deaths in the early stages of the epidemic when this is not the case. Thus, we estimated the numbers of COVID-19 and collateral deaths, once a clear upward trend is evident, as the number of actual deaths less a baseline number determined as a proportion of the predicted number. By the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> wave of the pandemic, the predicted values have been used as the counterfactual.

**Warning:** The Department of Home Affairs has faced sporadic temporary office closures, particularly in areas that are more affected by COVID-19. This may affect our allocation of deaths to a particular metro area. For example, a death that occurred in the City of Cape Town might have been registered at an office outside of the City because of a temporary closure of offices in the metro. Closure may also cause a delay in the processing of the death registration which would result in an underestimate of the deaths in the most recent week.

## Background

This report provides estimates of the weekly number of deaths of all persons in South Africa for epidemiological **Week 4** of 2022, covering the period **23 - 29 Jan 2022**.

The predicted numbers of weekly deaths in 2022 have been estimated using the models prepared for 2021 with population estimates for 2022. A methodological note outlining the approach for monitoring deaths during 2021 can be downloaded from the SAMRC website: [https://www.samrc.ac.za/sites/default/files/files/2021-01-24/Methodological Note on Predicted Weekly Deaths 20 Jan 2021.pdf](https://www.samrc.ac.za/sites/default/files/files/2021-01-24/Methodological%20Note%20on%20Predicted%20Weekly%20Deaths%20Jan%202021.pdf).

Briefly, the predicted values for the provinces and nationally are based on negative binomial models based on death data for the period 2014-2019. After reviewing trends in the data, separate negative binomial models have been fitted to the unnatural deaths for all provinces combined, and separate models for natural deaths for each of KwaZulu-Natal, Western Cape and the Northern Cape, and the 6 other provinces in a combined model to provide estimates by age, sex and epi-week for each year. A prediction interval has been estimated on the basis of the variability in the observed weekly data for each reported domain. Predicted values for each metropolitan area continue to be based on the time-series model of data for 2018 and 2019 developed for 2020 as the trends in the sub-provincial data need further investigation to develop a comprehensive district-level model.

## Trends

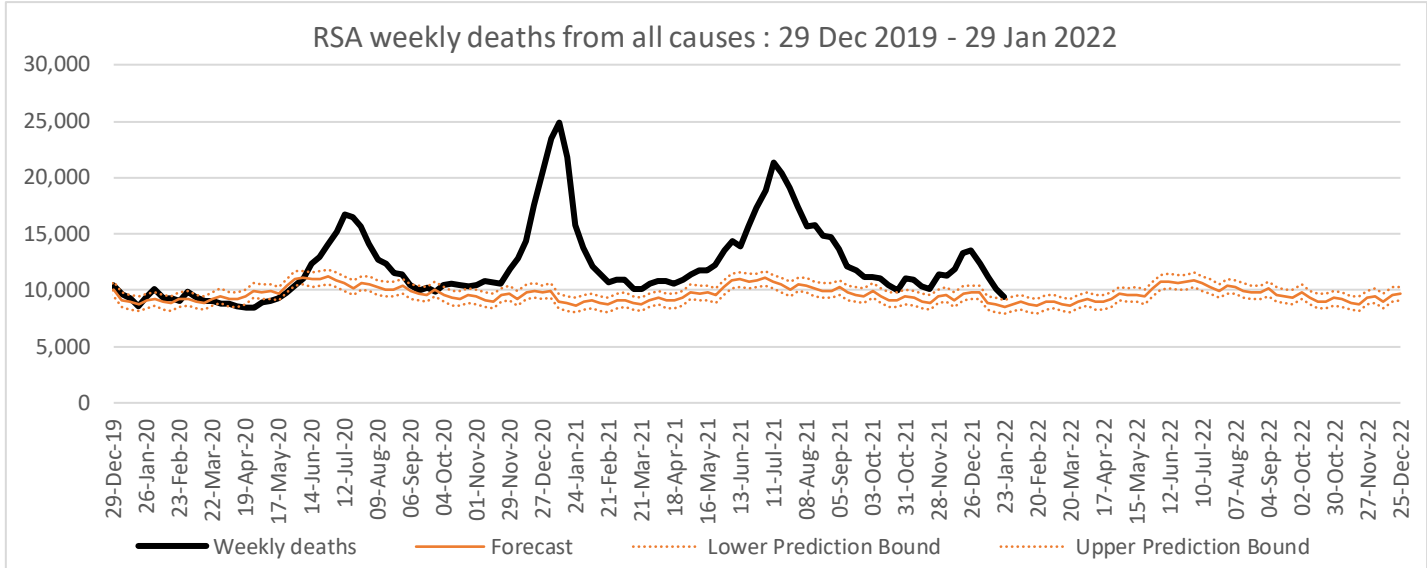
- The weekly number of deaths (all ages) from all causes decreased to **9,464** in **Week 4** (23 - 29 Jan 2022), resulting in an excess of **1,940** deaths during the week, slightly higher than the upper prediction bound.
- The number of excess deaths from natural causes (all ages) have decreased since a peak of **3,500** deaths in each of **Weeks 51** and **52** of 2021 down to **886** in **Week 4** (23 - 29 Jan 2022) with a p-score of 12%.
- Since 3 May 2020, there has been a cumulative total of more than **294,500** excess deaths from natural causes of persons all ages of which **85,000** occurred in 2020, just over **202,000** occurred in 2021 (since 3 Jan 2021) and more than **7,000** occurred in 2022.

Week	Date	Weekly excess deaths from natural causes (all ages)	Cumulative excess since 3 May 2020 (all ages)	Cumulative excess since 3 January 2021 (all ages)	Cumulative excess since 2 January 2022 (all ages)
43	24-Oct-21 – 30-Oct-21	824	269,001	184,054	
44	31-Oct-21 – 6-Nov-21	1,415	270,416	185,468	
45	7-Nov-21 – 13-Nov-21	1,539	271,955	187,008	
46	14-Nov-21 – 20-Nov-21	1,245	273,201	188,253	
47	21-Nov-21 – 27-Nov-21	1,208	274,409	189,462	
48	28-Nov-21 – 4-Dec-21	1,884	276,293	191,346	
49	5-Dec-21 – 11-Dec-21	1,704	277,997	193,049	
50	12-Dec-21 – 18-Dec-21	2,587	280,583	195,636	
51	19-Dec-21 – 25-Dec-21	3,525	284,109	199,162	
52	26-Dec-21 – 1-Jan-22	3,521	287,630	202,682	
1	2-Jan-22 – 8-Jan-22	2,676	290,306		2,676
2	9-Jan-22 – 15-Jan-22	2,246	292,552		4,922
3	16-Jan-22 – 22-Jan-22	1,329	293,881		6,251
4	23-Jan-22 – 29-Jan-22	886	294,767		7,137

- For people under the age of 60, the number of natural deaths has continued to decline and is tracking within the prediction bounds. The cumulative number of excess natural deaths for people under-60 years since **3 May 2020** was just over **77,500**.
- The number of weekly excess deaths in the 60+ years age group has also declined in **Week 4** (23 - 29 Jan 2022) to **682**, but is still above the upper prediction bound. The cumulative total number of excess natural deaths in this age group since **3 May 2020** was **217,300**.

Week	Date	Weekly excess deaths from natural causes for persons 60+ years	p-score
43	24-Oct-21 – 30-Oct-21	697	17.9%
44	31-Oct-21 – 6-Nov-21	839	20.9%
45	7-Nov-21 – 13-Nov-21	938	23.6%
46	14-Nov-21 – 20-Nov-21	844	21.8%
47	21-Nov-21 – 27-Nov-21	814	21.3%
48	28-Nov-21 – 4-Dec-21	1,116	28.0%
49	5-Dec-21 – 11-Dec-21	1,201	29.7%
50	12-Dec-21 – 18-Dec-21	1,761	45.7%
51	19-Dec-21 – 25-Dec-21	2,441	60.9%
52	26-Dec-21 – 1-Jan-22	2,590	63.8%
1	2-Jan-22 – 8-Jan-22	2,152	51.4%
2	9-Jan-22 – 15-Jan-22	1,696	43.4%
3	16-Jan-22 – 22-Jan-22	1,087	28.4%
4	23-Jan-22 – 29-Jan-22	682	18.4%

- The 4<sup>th</sup> wave has peaked in all of the nine provinces and numbers of natural deaths have decreased with small fluctuations. Deaths from natural causes in **Week 4** (23 - 29 Jan 2022) were higher than their upper prediction bound for in **Eastern Cape, Limpopo** and **Western Cape**.
- Per capita excess death rates have been calculated for the provinces to scale the cumulative deaths for the population size of each province (**Table 1**). By the end of **Week 4** (23 - 29 Jan 2022), the national excess death rate since 3 May 2020 was **495** per **100,000** population.
- The provinces with the highest cumulative numbers of excess deaths at the end of **Week 4** (23 - 29 Jan 2022), are, in order, **KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng** and **Eastern Cape**. The ranking changes to **Eastern Cape, Northern Cape** and **Free State** for the crude death rates per capita (i.e., taking size of the provincial populations into account) and to **Northern Cape** and **KwaZulu-Natal/Eastern Cape** using the age-standardised rates per capita (i.e., taking into account the age distribution of the provincial population). The **Western Cape** followed by **Gauteng** continue to have the lowest cumulative age standardised per capita rates.
- Following some declines below the predicted, coinciding with the change of lockdown to adjusted level 4 with re-banning of alcohol sales and extension of curfew, the number of unnatural deaths has tracked the predicted number since **Week 30** (25 – 31 Jul 2021). **Week 52** (26 Dec 2021 – 1 Jan 2022), followed the predicted trend closely and saw the highest number of unnatural deaths in 2021, at **1,574**. In **Week 4** (23 - 29 Jan 2022), there were **1,030** unnatural deaths, higher than the predicted number.



*Numbers have been scaled to the estimated actual number of death and for the last week has been adjusted for delayed registrations*

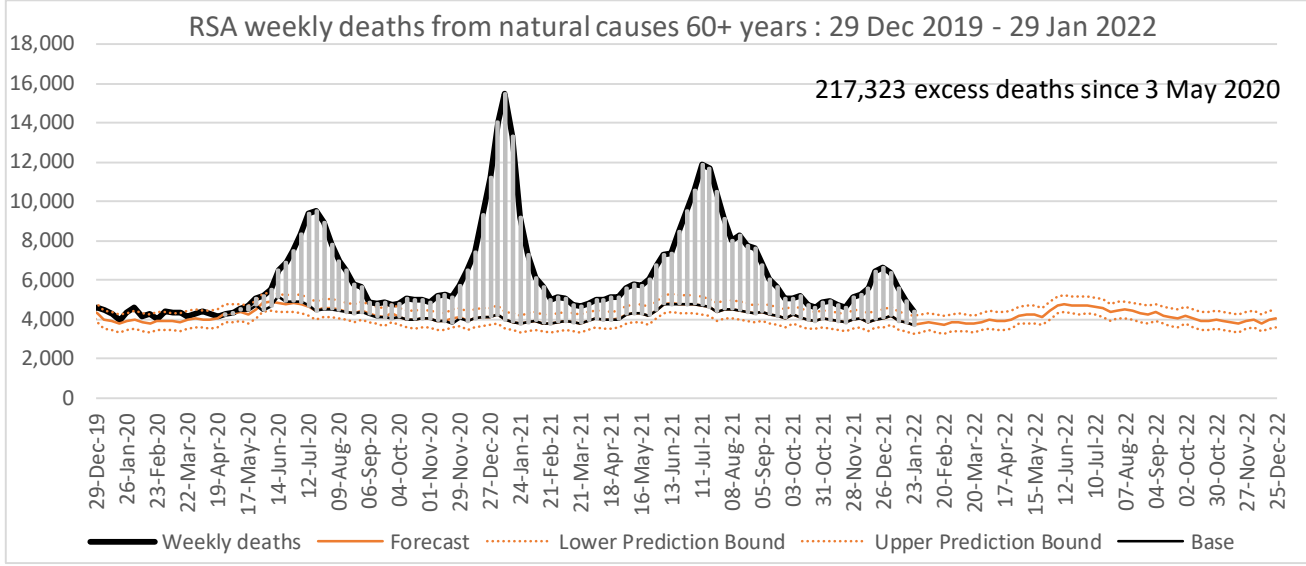
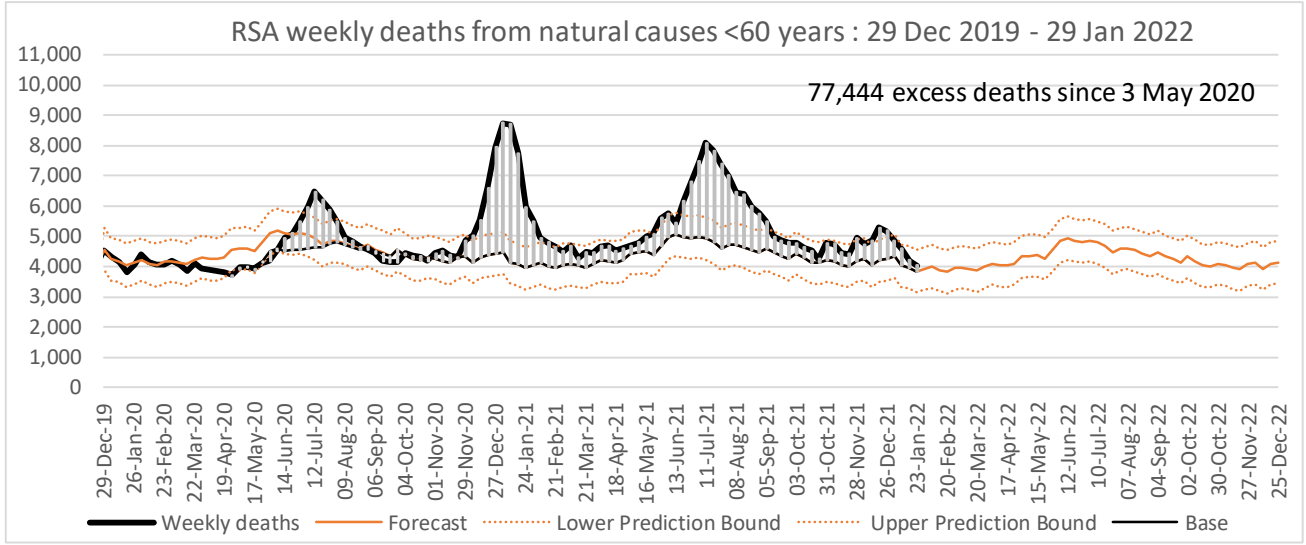
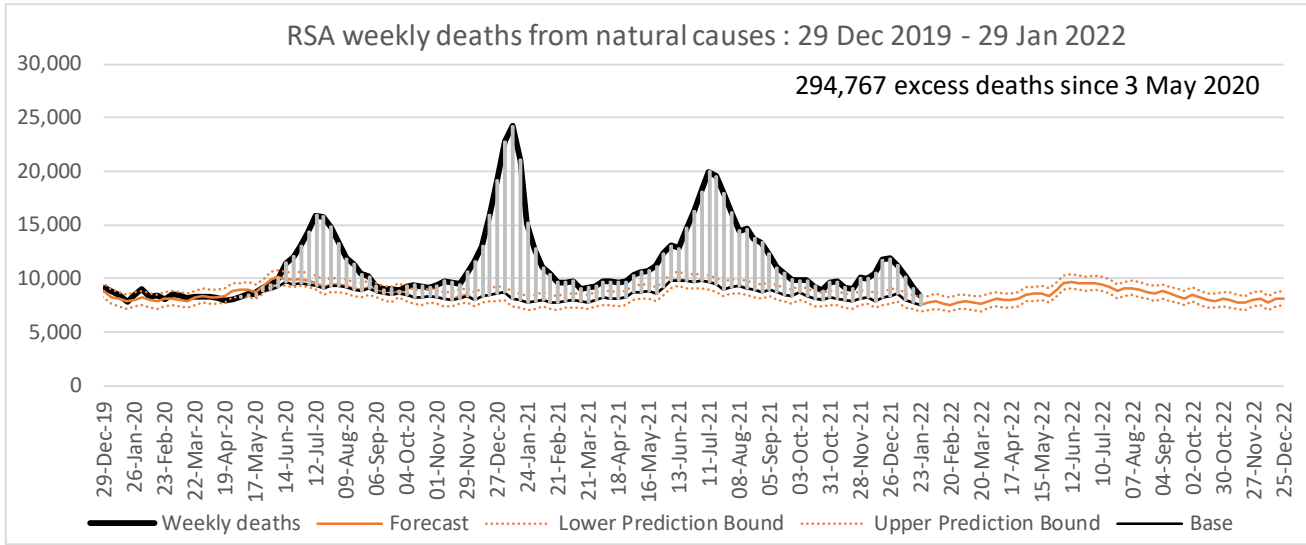
**Table 1: Number of excess natural deaths of persons by province and metro relative to revised predicted number based on the observed drop during lockdown, South Africa 2020/21**

Region	Period	Excess deaths vs revised base	Excess deaths per 100,000 population	Age standardised excess death rate per 100,000
South Africa	3 May 20 – 29 Jan 22	294,767	495	495
<b>Province</b>				
Eastern Cape	31 May 20 – 29 Jan 22	49,887	758	611
Free State	21 Jun 20 – 29 Jan 22	16,572	569	569
Gauteng	7 Jun 20 – 29 Jan 22	58,203	373	410
KwaZulu-Natal	7 Jun 20 – 29 Jan 22	60,619	530	609
Limpopo	21 Jun 20 – 29 Jan 22	31,455	532	466
Mpumalanga	21 Jun 20 – 29 Jan 22	22,671	471	508
Northern Cape	28 Jun 20 – 29 Jan 22	8,386	716	670
North West	28 Jun 20 – 29 Jan 22	16,540	411	422
Western Cape	3 May 20 – 29 Jan 22	30,434	431	380
<b>Metropolitan Municipality</b>				
Buffalo City	31 May 20 – 29 Jan 22	5,604		
City of Cape Town	3 May 20 – 29 Jan 22	21,578		
Ekurhuleni	7 Jun 20 – 29 Jan 22	14,380		
eThekweni	14 Jun 20 – 29 Jan 22	13,385		
Johannesburg	7 Jun 20 – 29 Jan 22	19,988		
Mangaung	21 Jun 20 – 29 Jan 22	4,851		
Nelson Mandela Bay	31 May 20 – 29 Jan 22	7,709		
City of Tshwane	7 Jun 20 – 29 Jan 22	11,062		

**Note: Period has been determined based on when an upturn in the number of natural deaths became apparent. Parts do not sum to the whole because office closures due to Covid-19 may have led to registration of deaths at other offices which may not be in the same area, and random fluctuation at the point at which the baseline is determined.**

**Table 2: Number of excess deaths from all causes of persons by province and metro relative to predicted number based on historical trend, South Africa 2020/21**

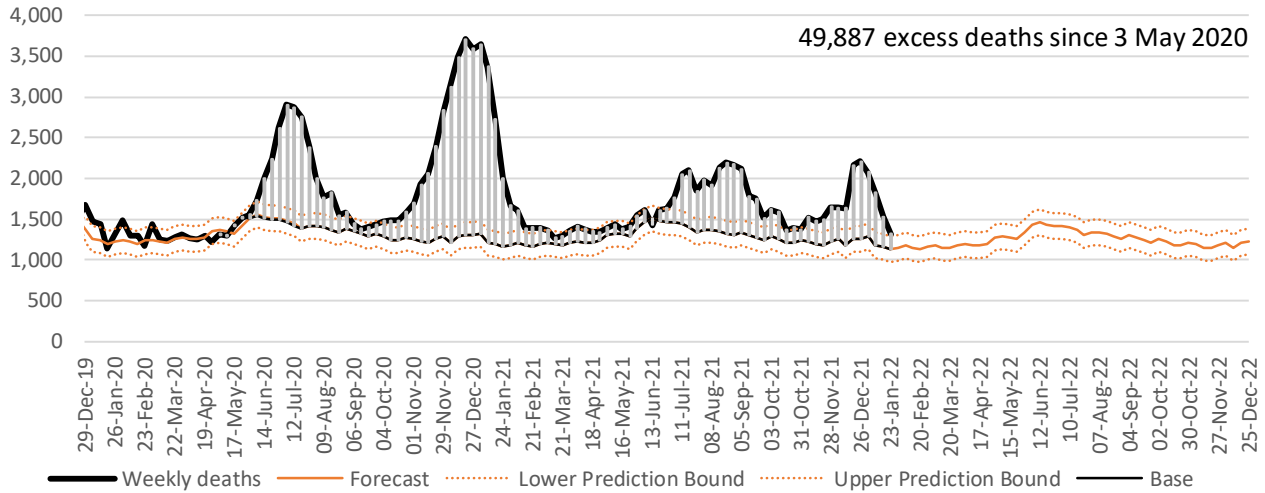
<b>Region</b>	<b>Excess deaths vs forecast</b>	<b>Excess deaths per 100,000 population</b>
South Africa	284,689	478
<b>Province</b>		
Eastern Cape	49,138	747
Free State	15,896	546
Gauteng	54,946	352
KwaZulu-Natal	60,350	527
Limpopo	30,778	521
Mpumalanga	21,940	456
Northern Cape	8,055	688
North West	15,807	393
Western Cape	27,779	394
<b>Metropolitan Municipality</b>		
Buffalo City	5,445	
City of Cape Town	19,467	
Ekurhuleni	13,085	
eThekweni	12,098	
Johannesburg	19,463	
Mangaung	5,073	
Nelson Mandela Bay	7,465	
City of Tshwane	11,246	



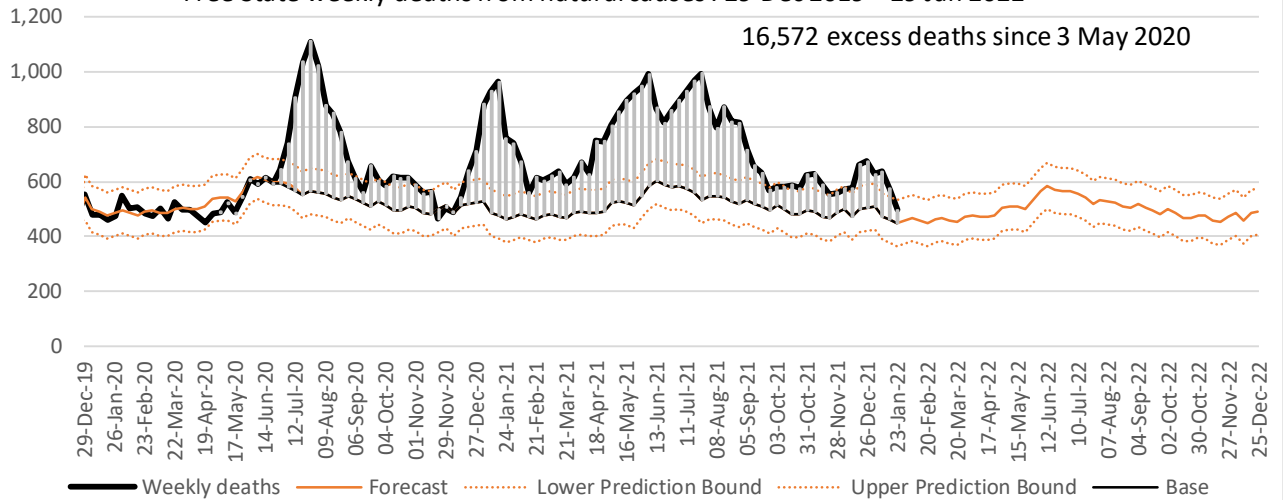
Numbers have been scaled to the estimated actual number of death and for the last week has been adjusted for delayed registrations



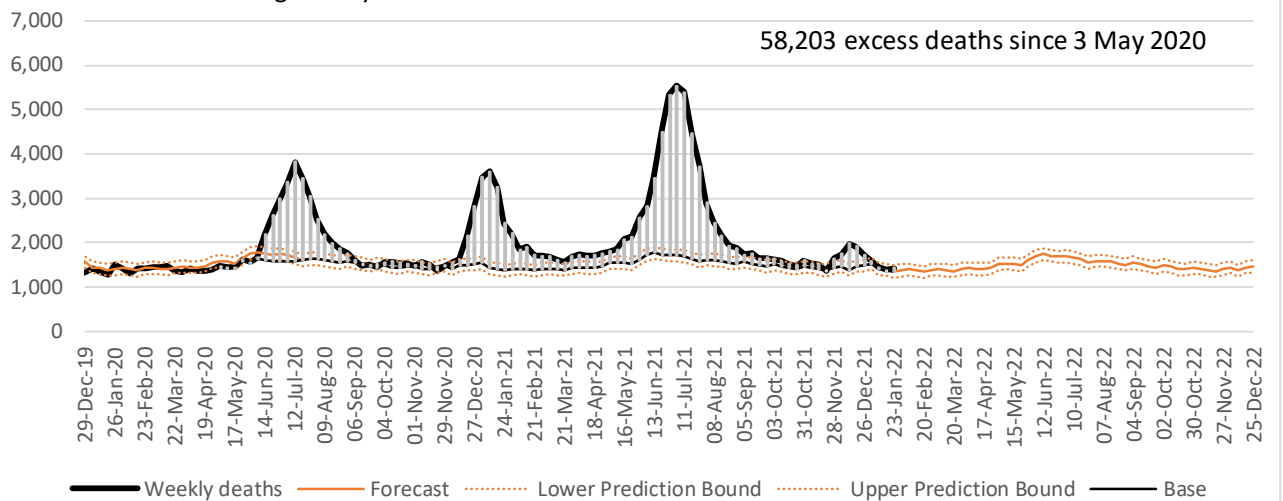
Eastern Cape weekly deaths from natural causes : 29 Dec 2019 - 29 Jan 2022



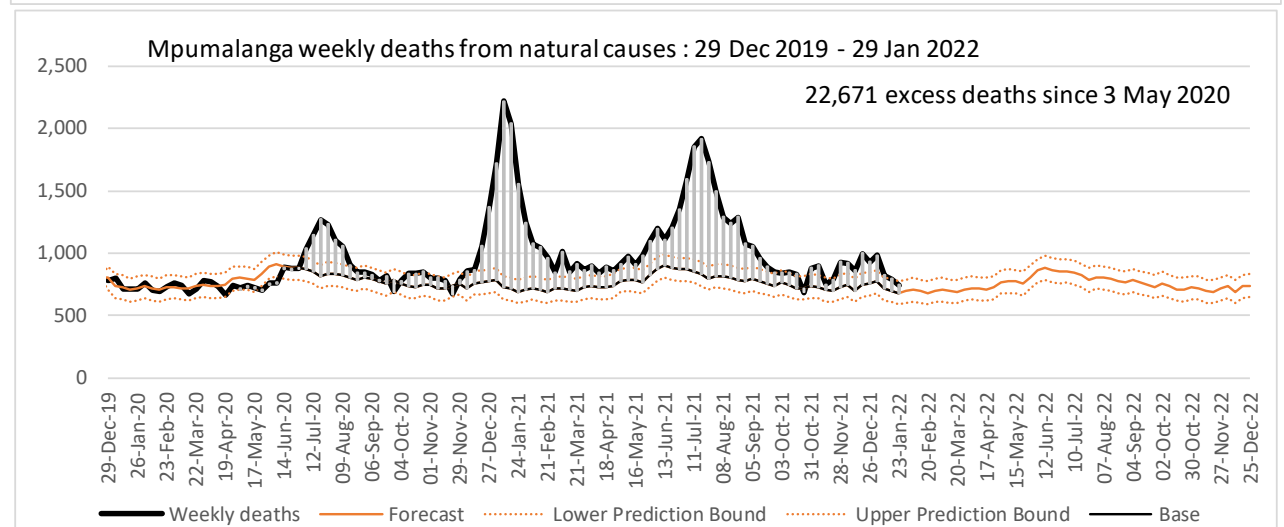
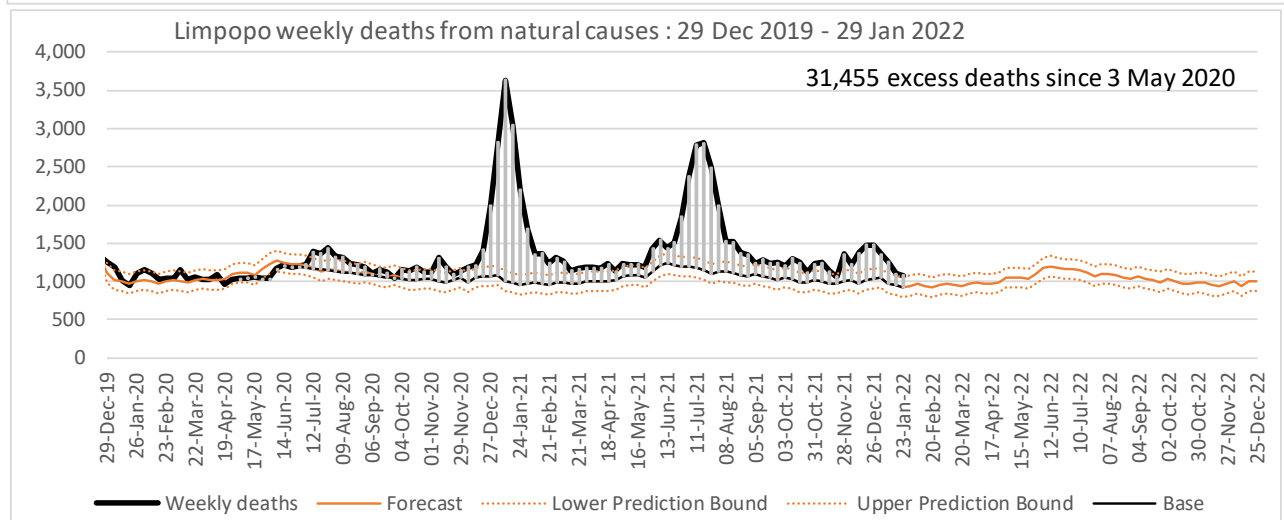
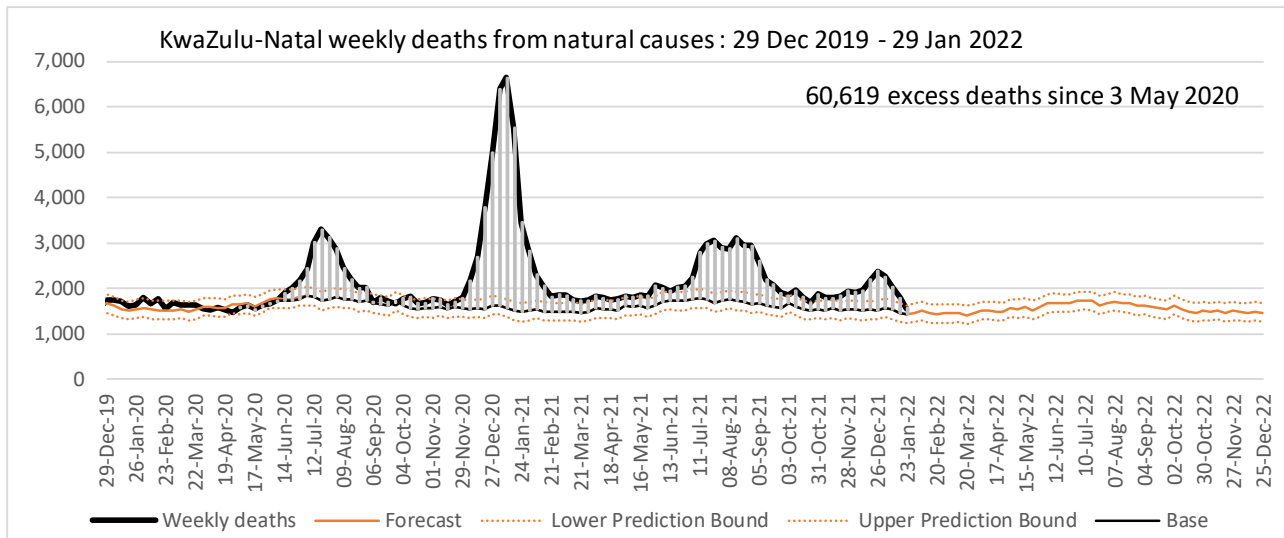
Free State weekly deaths from natural causes : 29 Dec 2019 - 29 Jan 2022



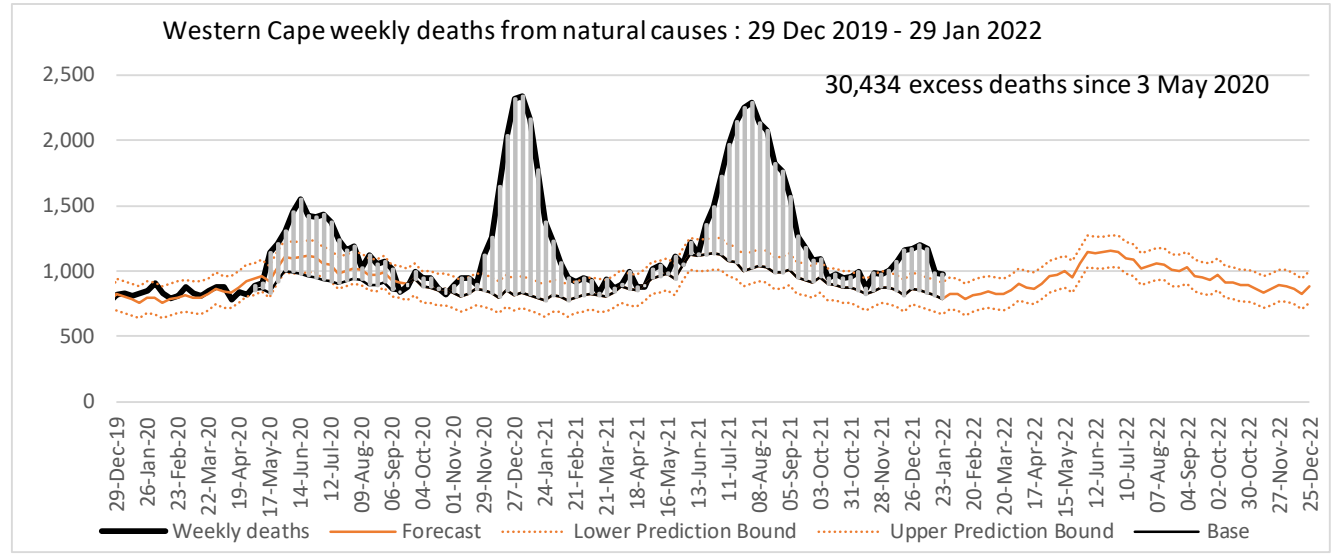
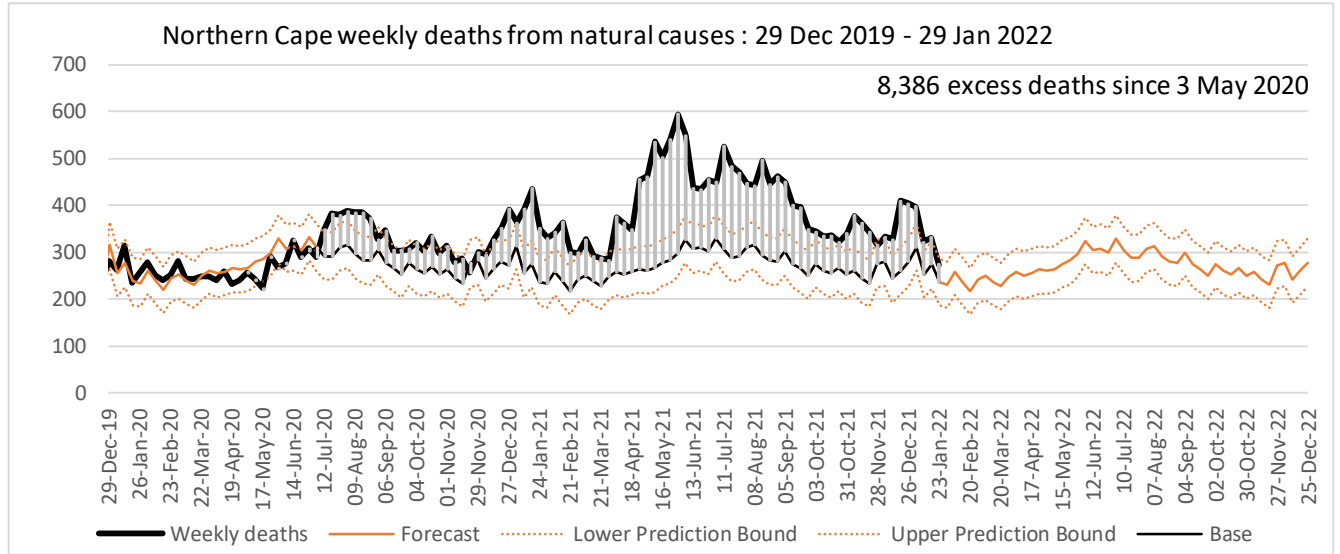
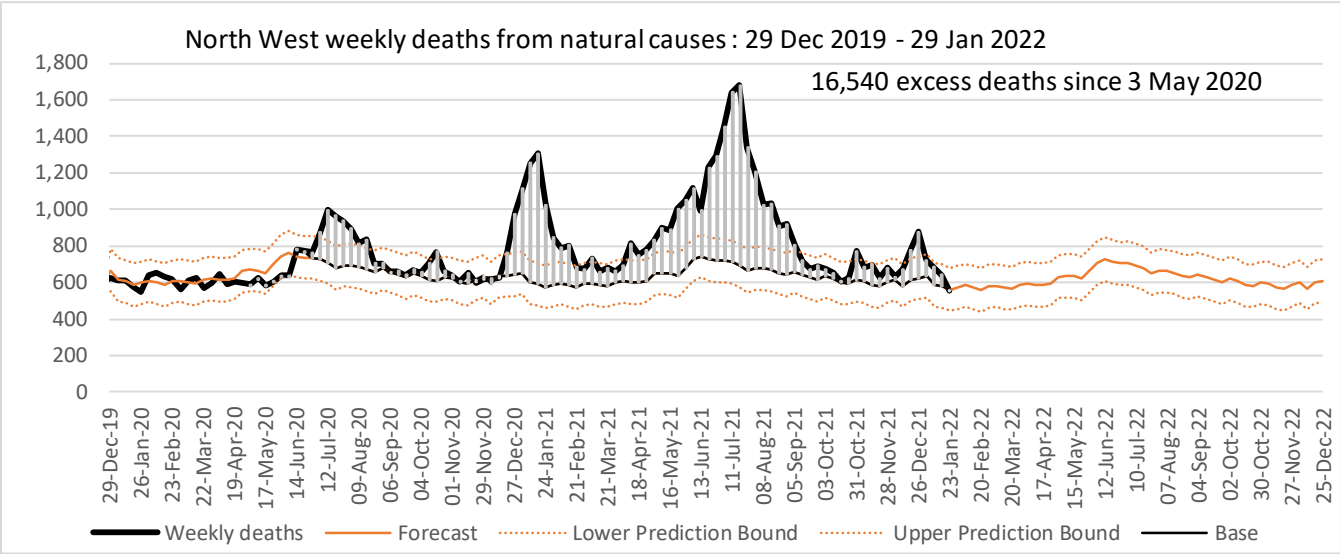
Gauteng weekly deaths from natural causes : 29 Dec 2019 - 29 Jan 2022



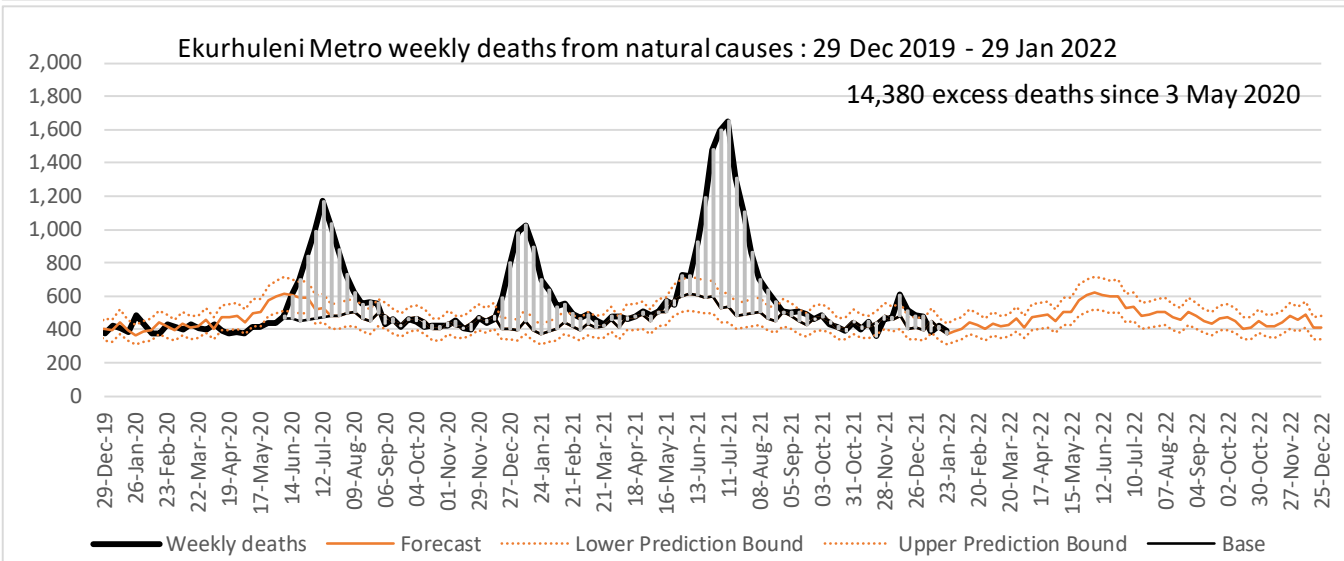
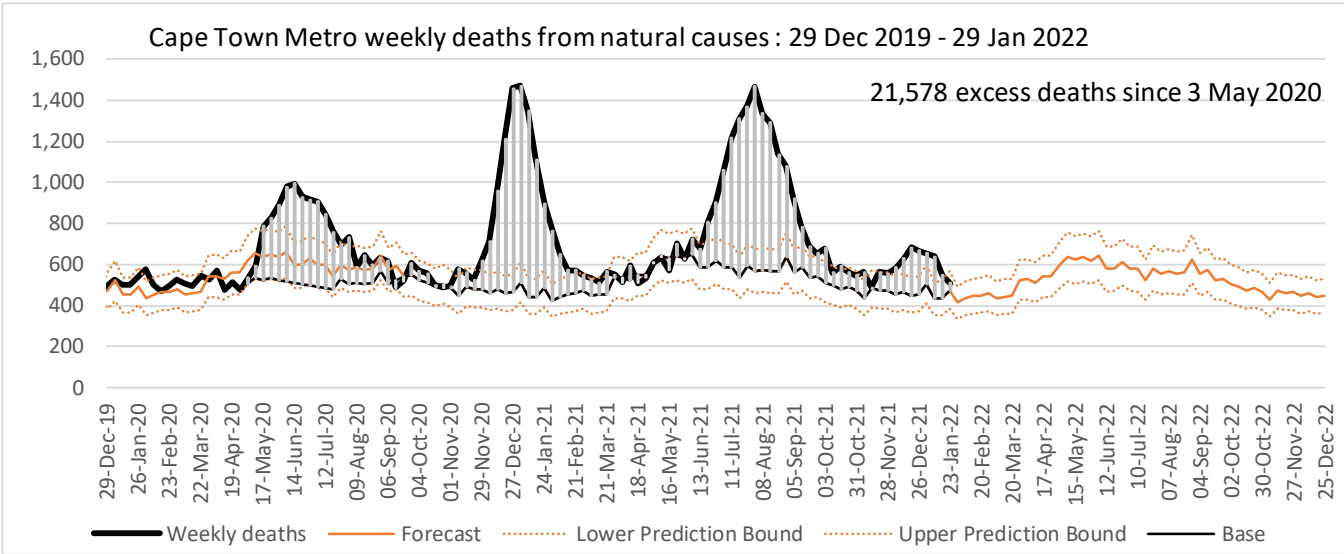
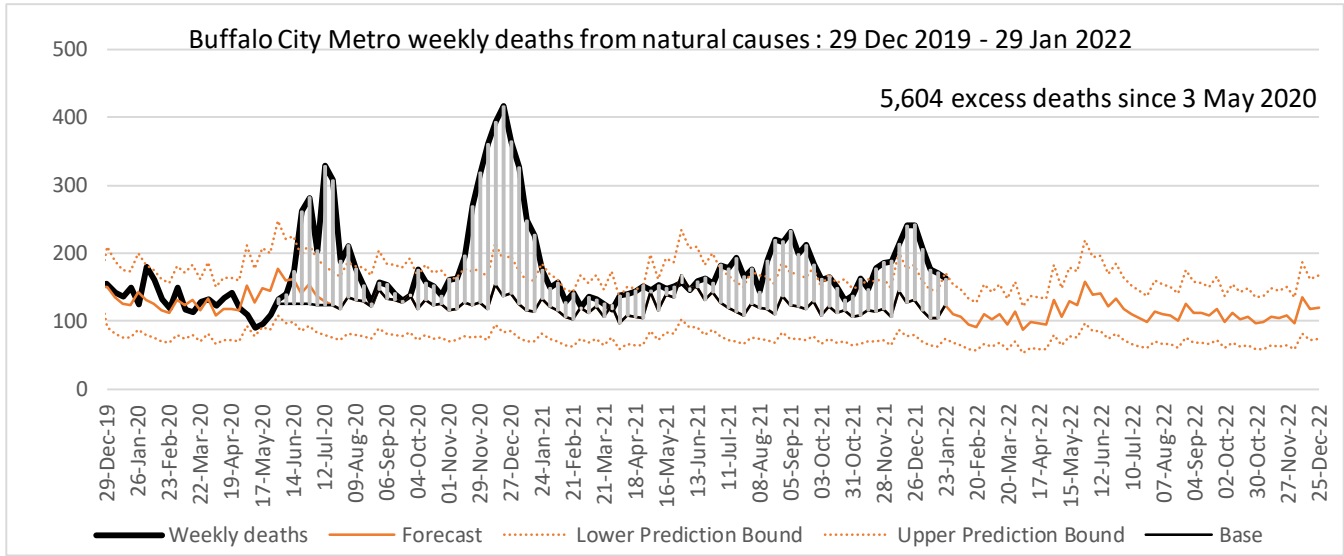
Numbers have been scaled to the estimated actual number of death and for the last week has been adjusted for delayed registrations



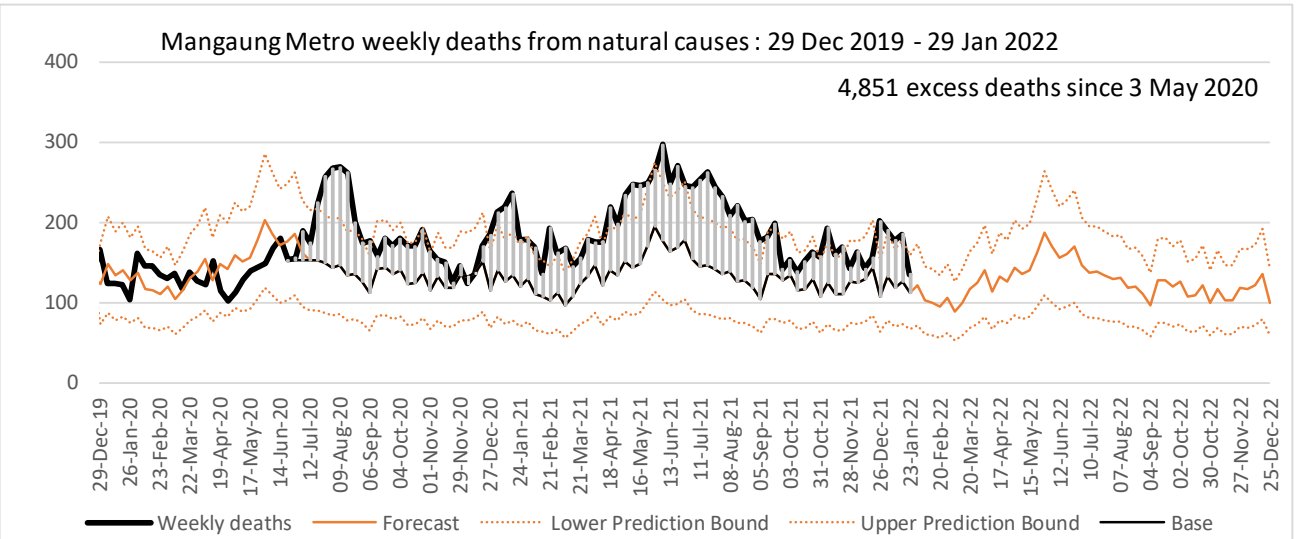
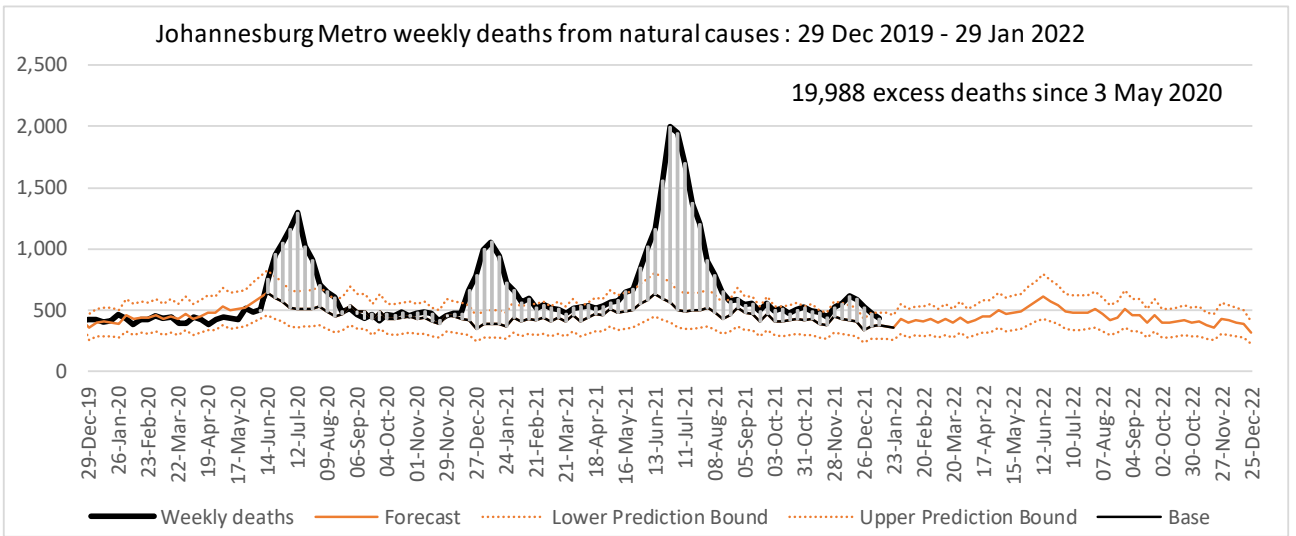
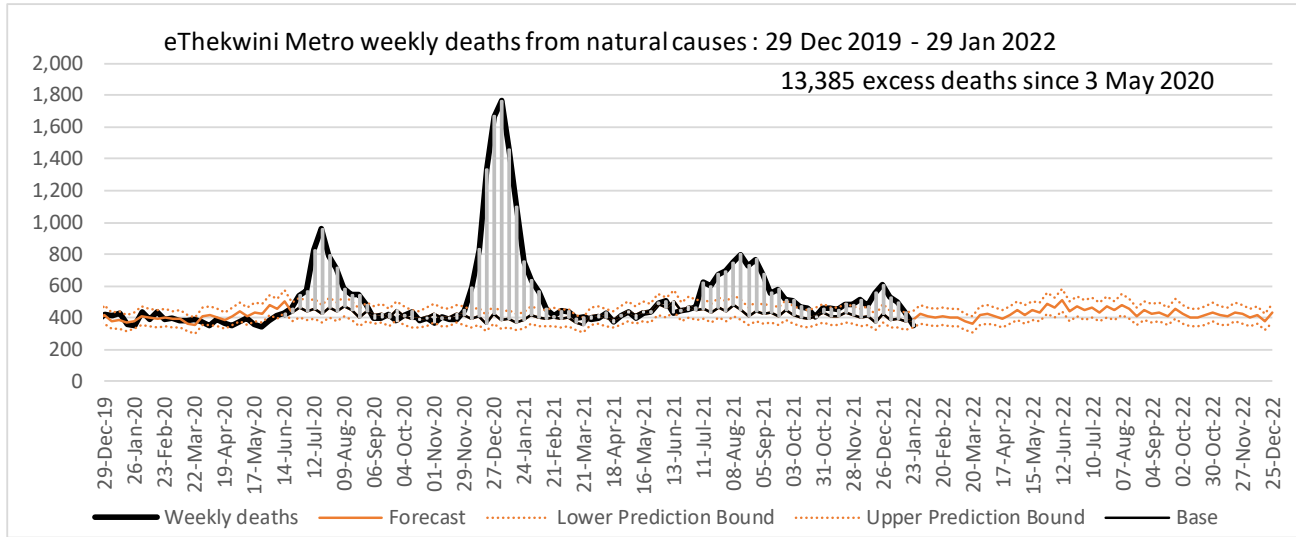
*Numbers have been scaled to the estimated actual number of death and for the last week has been adjusted for delayed registrations*



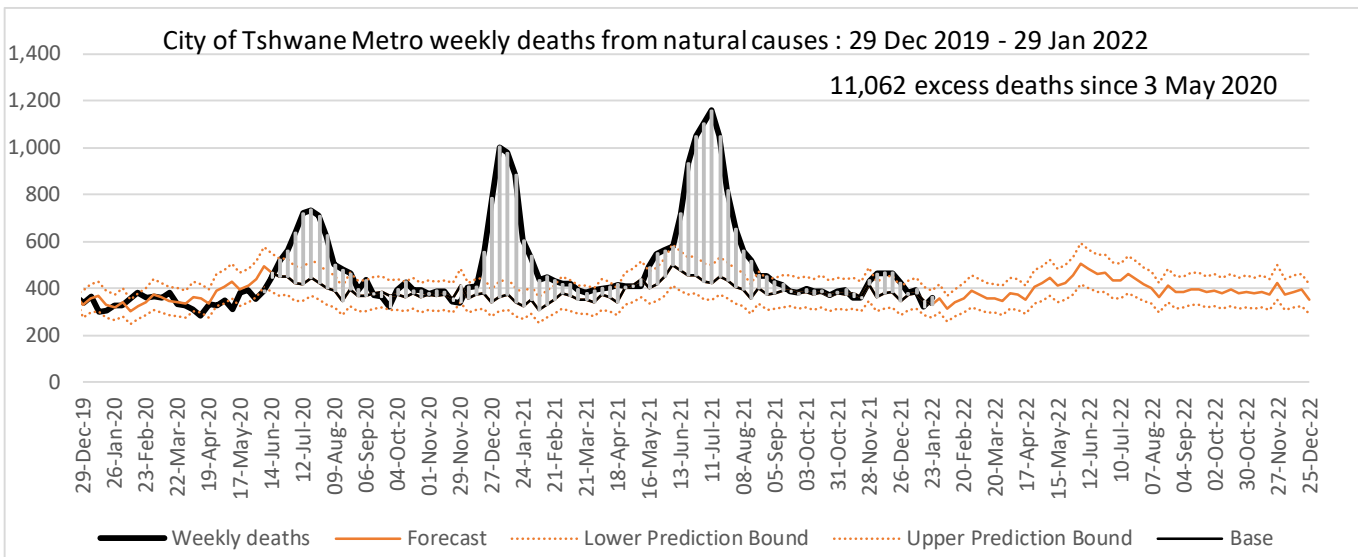
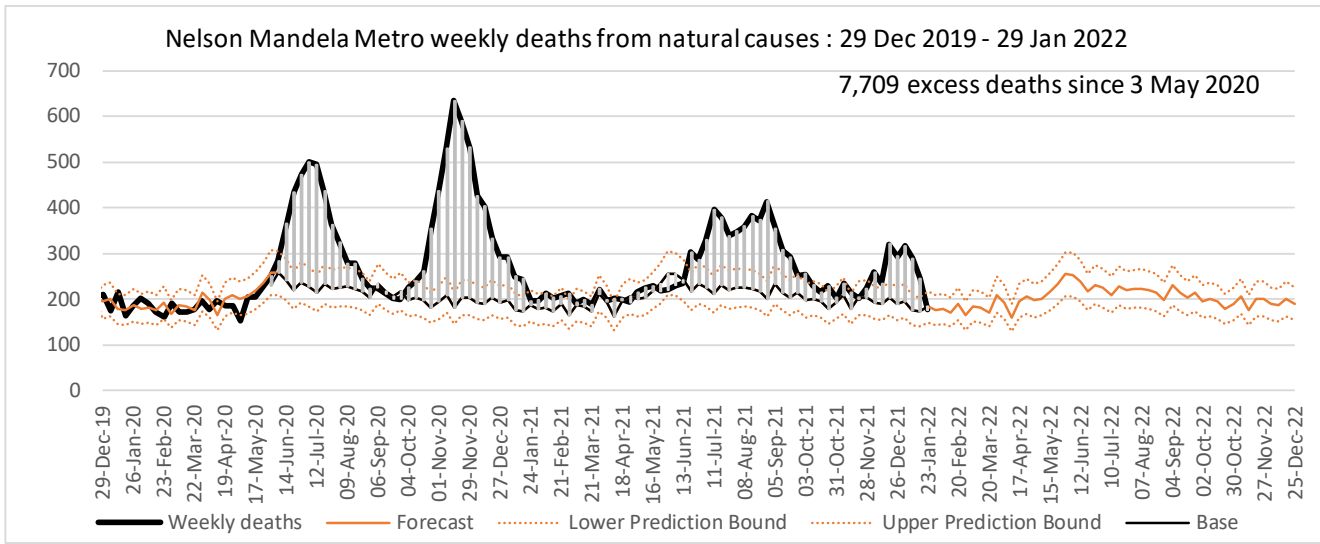
Numbers have been scaled to the estimated actual number of death and for the last week has been adjusted for delayed registrations



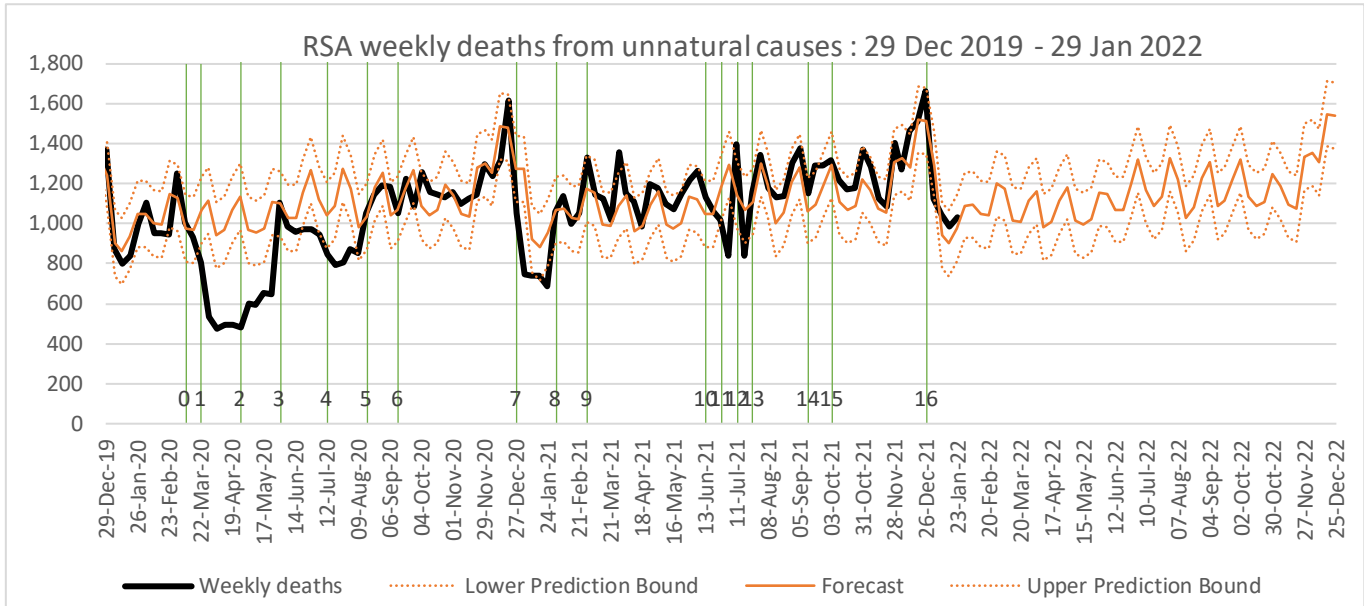
Numbers have been scaled to the estimated actual number of death and for the last week has been adjusted for delayed registrations



Numbers have been scaled to the estimated actual number of death and for the last week has been adjusted for delayed registrations



*Numbers have been scaled to the estimated actual number of death and for the last week has been adjusted for delayed registrations*



Numbers have been scaled to the estimated actual number of death and for the last week has been adjusted for delayed registrations. As only a quarter to a third of unnatural deaths in the most recent week are processed at the time of the survey, the estimate for the most recent week is quite uncertain.

**Vertical lines in order**

- 0 Week Disaster Management Act implemented
- 1 Week lockdown level 5 introduced
- 2 Week lockdown changed to level 4, with curfew
- 3 Week lockdown changed to level 3 including unbanning of alcohol
- 4 Week alcohol re-banned and a curfew re-introduced
- 5 Week lockdown changed to level 2, including unbanning of alcohol
- 6 Week lockdown changed to level 1
- 7 Week lockdown changed to level 3 advanced (rebanning alcohol and a extension of curfew)
- 8 Week lockdown relaxed to allow sale of alcohol 4 days/week and reduce curfew
- 9 Week lockdown relaxed to allow sale of alcohol except during curfew and reduce curfew to midnight to 4am
- 10 Week lockdown changed to level 3 advanced (limiting alcohol and a extending of curfew)
- 11 Week lockdown changed to level 4, with re-banning of alcohol, curfew 9pm-4am
- 12 Week of unrest in KZN and GT
- 13 Week lockdown changed to level 3 advanced (alcohol 4 days/w, curfew 10pm-4am)
- 14 Week lockdown changed to level 2 advanced (alcohol 5 days/w, curfew 11pm-4am)
- 15 Week lockdown changed to level 1 advanced (no alcohol post 11pm, curfew 12pm-4am, large gatherings)
- 16 Week lockdown level 1 advanced (removed limits on alcohol & curfew, allowed larger gatherings)