

REPORT OF A BREACH OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR STATISTICS

1. Core Information [\[guidance\]](#)

Title and link to statistical output	Weekly National Flu Report, 18 October 2018: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/weekly-national-flu-reports-2018-to-2019-season Weekly all-cause mortality surveillance week 42 (2018) report, 18 October 2018: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/weekly-all-cause-mortality-surveillance-2018-to-2019
Name of producer organisation	Public Health England
Name and contact details of person dealing with report	Clare Griffiths Head of Profession for Official Statistics Health Improvement Directorate Public Health England Zone 7S, Wellington House 133-155 Waterloo Road London SE1 8UG Email: clare.griffiths@phe.gov.uk
Link to published statement about the breach (if relevant)	Not applicable
Date of breach report	25/10/2018

2. Circumstances of breach [\[guidance\]](#)

Relevant principle(s) and practice(s)	Trustworthiness pillar: T3: Orderly release T3.6: Statistics should be released to all users at 9.30am on a weekday.
Date of occurrence of breach	18/10/2018
<i>Give an account of what happened including roles of persons involved, dates, times etc</i>	
<p>On the morning of Thursday 18 October 2018, the weekly national flu report and weekly all-cause mortality report pages were prepared and scheduled for publication at 2:00pm as usual.</p> <p>There is Code of Practice publication time exception in place for these weekly reports so they can be published as soon as possible, 2:00pm, after preparation and sign off on Thursday mornings.</p> <p>At 2:01pm, the PHE Programme Support Officer, who had arranged publication of the pages with the Digital Content team in Public Health England, hadn't received the usual automated notification of publication emails from GOV.UK. The PHE Programme Support Officer immediately checked the website and then Whitehall publisher to see whether they had been published. The Whitehall publisher system indicated that the pages had published at 2:00pm as scheduled but there was no sign of the publication pages on GOV.UK. The PHE Programme Support Officer contacted a member of the Digital Content Team for advice. At first, this was believed to be a caching issue, as it can take up to 15 minutes before updated content appears on the site. At 2:20pm, following a 'cache bust' of the pages and checking for publication on another device, the reports still hadn't appeared.</p> <p>Before the breach was resolved, one of the attachments associated with the national weekly flu report was updated by the PHE Programme Support Officer at 4pm, at the request of the statistics team. Following this update, the national weekly flu report was re-submitted for publication. The page history</p>	

indicates that this was published by the PHE Digital Content Team at 4.41pm. The updated, published page was visible and checked by the PHE Programme Support Officer at 5:15 pm on the day.

The all-cause mortality report was manually published by Government Digital Service (GDS) at 8:20pm.

3. Impact of the breach [\[guidance\]](#)

Provide details of the impact of the breach both inside the producer body and externally

There was an impact on the publication lead for the reports, PHE Programme Support Officer, colleagues in the Digital Content Team who reported and monitored the delay and Government Digital Service developers who worked to resolve it.

4. Corrective actions (taken or planned) to prevent re-occurrence [\[guidance\]](#)

Describe the short-term actions made to redress the situation and the longer term changes to procedures etc

As soon as the delay was noticed, the PHE Programme Support Officer immediately contacted the Digital Content team for advice and to ask if there were any known issues with GOV.UK.

The PHE Programme Support Officer also informed the PHE Head of Profession for Statistics that there seemed to be an issue with GOV.UK and the weekly national flu and all-cause mortality reports hadn't published as pre-announced at 2:00pm.

The Digital Content team checked for any reports of a publishing problem with GOV.UK on 'Basecamp' – another agency had also reported having problems. The Senior Content Developer in the Digital Content team contacted GDS to report the issue.

The Digital Content team and PHE Programme Support Officer regularly checked for publication of the reports during the afternoon and for further updates on the issue.

After the incident was over and both reports were published, a developer in GDS manually republished everything that had been scheduled for publication at 2:00pm that day (including the all-cause mortality report). GDS continued to monitor the issue overnight into Friday morning.

It is understood that the problem was caused by an overload of scheduled publishing at 2:00pm on Thursday, but the issue itself arose from a code bug in the publishing application, which meant it didn't retry any content that had failed to publish at 2:00pm. A fix has been put in place by GDS and this issue is being investigated by the Platform Health team in GDS to ensure similar incidents don't happen again.

A system is being put in place to alert key stakeholders in the event of future issues. The PHE Programme Support Officer will also arrange for alerts to be sent via social media through PHE Communications team and the GOV.Delivery email system, to try and minimise any potential impact on users.