

# First Minister admits Scotland's record on drug deaths is 'indefensible'

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has admitted that Scotland's record on drug deaths is "indefensible" and said she was "sorry for every family that has suffered grief" saying they had been let down.

She also said she would chair a meeting of the drugs taskforce in January and would report back to MSPs later that month to set out what "immediate steps" could be taken.



Scottish Ambulance Service. Photo: Martin P. McAdam  
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The number of deaths rose to a record 1,264 in 2019 – double the number in 2014 and the worst rate in Europe.

The number of drug-related deaths in Scotland now stands far in advance of the figures recorded in any European country per head of population, and is three and a half times worse than in England and Wales.

Speaking at First Minister's Questions yesterday, Scottish Conservative group leader Ruth Davidson said that services had been "cut to the bone" by the Scottish government and more funding must be committed to avoid a repeat of the "horrendous" figures in future.

Ms Sturgeon responded: "This should not be comfortable. I am not going to stand here and defend the indefensible, these lives matter too much. We owe it to the lives which can still

be saved that people like me do not engage in the usual political defensiveness, but redouble our efforts.”

The UK government, which has power over drug laws, has repeatedly refused requests from the Scottish government to allow so-called safe consumption rooms to be set up to help tackle the problem.