

Child deaths during pandemic lowest on record for England

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The number of children in England who died fell to 3,067 between April 2020–March 2021. This is 356 fewer deaths than were recorded in the preceding 12 months (April 2019–March 2020), and likely represents

the lowest level of child mortality on record, according to a new study by researchers at the Universities of Bristol and Cardiff and published today [7 December] in *Archives of Disease in Childhood*.

The study, which uses data from the University of Bristol-led National Child Mortality Database (NCMD)—a first-of-its-kind initiative to collect comprehensive and timely data on every [child death](#) in England—sought to quantify the relative risk of childhood deaths across England during the first year of the COVID pandemic, compared to a similar period of 2019.

Findings from the analysis showed that deaths from non-COVID infections and other underlying [medical conditions](#) fell, and there is some evidence that deaths from substance abuse also reduced. In addition, the reduction in [mortality](#) appeared to occur during the winter months, where the seasonal increase, often caused by infections other than COVID-19, was not apparent. This period coincided with the prolonged lockdown in England from January to April 2021; suggesting that public health measures may be able to modify a significant number of childhood deaths every year. The reduction in child deaths was most prominent in [children](#) under ten years old.

These findings stand in stark contrast to overall mortality for England's population, which was 14% higher than the previous year—and suggest that widespread changes in the delivery of healthcare during the pandemic may have prevented child deaths.

Professor Karen Luyt, Programme Lead for the National Child Mortality Database and Professor of Neonatal Medicine at the University of Bristol, said: "There was clear evidence that the reduction in mortality was seen in two key areas: those children with underlying health conditions and those who died of infectious diseases other than COVID. Our data demonstrate that [child](#) deaths caused by seasonal infections are

potentially substantially modifiable at population level. It is therefore important that we learn from the effects highlighted in this study to improve the outcome for the most vulnerable children in our society."

More information: David Odd et al, Child mortality in England during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, *Archives of Disease in Childhood* (2021). [DOI: 10.1136/archdischild-2021-323370](https://doi.org/10.1136/archdischild-2021-323370)

Provided by University of Bristol

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