

US virus deaths may top 80,000 despite confinement: study

26 March 2020



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COVID-19 could lead to more than 80,000 deaths in the US and overwhelm hospital capacity nationally as soon as early April even if social distancing measures are respected, new research showed Thursday.

The US death toll for the pandemic has already soared past 1,000, with 68,000 confirmed infections.

Forecasters at the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington's School of Medicine analysed the latest COVID-19 data at a local, national and international level.

These include hospitalisation and mortality rates, as well as patient data in terms of age, gender and pre-existing health problems.

Specifically, they looked at the time lag between the first fatal cases and public interventions such as shuttering schools and businesses.

They then looked at each American state's ICU bed and ventilator capacity.

The analysis warned that based on current trends, demand for both would far exceed capacity for COVID-19 patients as early as the second week of April.

During the epidemic peak—also set for some point in April—as many as 2,300 patients could die every day, according to the IHME models.

This was the case even if the population adhered to strict social distancing measures.

"Our estimated trajectory of COVID-19 deaths assumes continued and uninterrupted vigilance by the general public, hospital workers, and government agencies," said Christopher Murray, IHME director.

"The trajectory of the pandemic will change—and dramatically for the worse—if people ease up on social distancing or relax with other precautions."

The analysis estimated that approximately 81,000 people in the US will die from the virus over the coming four months.

Estimates ranged between 38,000 and more than 160,000.

It forecast that a total of 21 US states will need more ICU beds than are currently available and that 12 states may need to increase their capacity by 50 percent or more to accommodate patient needs.

The economic shutdown triggered by the coronavirus pandemic caused an unprecedented 3.3 million people to file for unemployment benefits last week alone.

"We hope these forecasts will help leaders of medical systems figure out innovative ways to deliver high-quality care to those who will need their services in the coming weeks," said Murray.

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APA citation: US virus deaths may top 80,000 despite confinement: study (2020, March 26) retrieved 8 November 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-03-virus-deaths-confinement.html>

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