

Obesity may impact mortality in COVID-19 patients

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Credit: William Atkins/GW Today

Reports coming in from COVID-19 patients in Italy and China, as well as data from the H1N1 influenza pandemic, suggest that obesity is likely a pre-existing condition that can exacerbate COVID-19, researchers in the George Washington University Milken Institute School of Public Health have found.

Carlos Santos-Burgoa, professor of global health, and William Dietz, chair of the Sumner M. Redstone Global Center for Prevention and Wellness, published a [letter to the editor](#) with their findings in the journal *Obesity* earlier this month.

Researchers studying the H1N1 pandemic found that obesity led to decreased [respiratory function](#), difficulties with ventilation and increased [inflammatory cytokines](#)—proteins regulating inflammatory response—all of which contributed to likelihood of death.

The same problems may be occurring with COVID-19 patients who have obesity, Drs. Dietz and Santos-Burgoa said.

"The H1N1 influenza experience should serve as a caution for the care of COVID patients with obesity, and particularly patients with severe obesity," the authors said, adding that obesity in the U.S. has been on the rise. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an estimated 42 percent of all adults in the U.S. have obesity or severe obesity.

Increased mortality from COVID-19 in Italy might be related to a higher prevalence of adult obesity there as compared to China, Drs. Dietz and Santos-Burgoa said. "These observations emphasize the need for increased vigilance, priority on detection and testing, and aggressive therapy for patients with obesity and COVID-19 infections."

More information: William Dietz et al. Obesity and its Implications for COVID-19 Mortality, *Obesity* (2020). [DOI: 10.1002/oby.22818](https://doi.org/10.1002/oby.22818)

Provided by George Washington University

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