

Over half of those with COVID-19 on mental health wards also had dementia

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New research published October 5 in the scientific journal *The Lancet Psychiatry* reports that over half of those who contracted COVID-19 on mental health wards also had dementia.

It is the first study to look at the effect of COVID-19 on those with dementia during the height of the pandemic in London. The researchers led by Prof Livingston at University College London found:

- Of those with COVID-19 in mental health wards over half (56%) had dementia
- Those on mental health wards received resources later than those admitted locally
- Wards (on average) received COVID-19 testing kits four and a half days after the first clinical COVID-19 presentation.

Researchers collected information from five London mental health NHS trusts in spring 2020 (1st March to 30th April).

They then calculated the total number of COVID-19 and analyzed patients' symptoms, treatments, and outcomes.

They found those in mental health wards received resources later than those admitted locally with [physical illness](#). The researchers suggest this led to greater levels of COVID-19 infection and subsequent death than in the community.

They also suggest high levels of having more than one illness and older age led to high viral load in the wards.

Alison Evans, Head of Policy at Alzheimer's Research UK, said:

"This new report looking at the impact of COVID-19 on people with dementia in mental [health](#) wards in spring of 2020 is a stark reminder of the deadly nature of this virus. The report also makes it clear that the true number of those with dementia affected by COVID-19 is likely to be even greater than official figures suggest. Since we first saw the deadly impact of this virus, we have urged the government to do more to protect people with dementia from COVID-19 and stop further deaths. This report makes it clear that we must not become complacent, particularly with rising infection rates across the country."

She added, "The COVID-19 crisis is also a dementia crisis, and the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on people with dementia has only made the already pressing need for dementia research even more urgent. While this research suggests some possible reasons why people with dementia in this setting may have been more at risk, we need to see comprehensive studies investigating this further. The virus and its economic fallout continue to put the future of dementia research at risk. We must hold this government to account on their promise to double dementia research funding, which is vital to help bring about breakthroughs and protect people from further devastation. People with [dementia](#), and their loved ones, deserve nothing less."

More information: Gill Livingston et al.

Prevalence, management, and outcomes of SARS-CoV-2 infections in older people and those with dementia in mental health wards in London, UK: a retrospective observational study, *The Lancet Psychiatry* (2020). DOI:

[10.1016/S2215-0366\(20\)30434-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(20)30434-X)

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