

63,000 extra deaths and a year off life expectancy—COVID in 2020 in England and Wales

27 January 2021



An estimated 62,750 excess deaths resulted in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic in England and Wales. Credit: Shutterstock

An estimated 62,750 excess deaths resulted in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic in England and Wales, according to demographic experts at Oxford's Leverhulme Centre for Demographic Science—who reveal life expectancy was cut for men and women by -1.3 and -1.0 years respectively.

In a recently-published paper, the Leverhulme team calculate more people died in 2020 by comparing the number of deaths from all causes in 2020 with mortality trends from the past decade. This approach helps understanding the overall mortality impact of the pandemic. Using data on registered deaths in 2020, the team was able to compute life expectancy for that year and compare it with past levels in England and Wales.

Ridhi Kashyap one the study's authors says, "As the nation reels from the shocking news that the number of deaths in the UK in which COVID-19 is listed on the [death certificate](#) has exceeded 100,000, our research provides further understanding of the tragic impact of the pandemic

in England and Wales.

"Our calculations show almost 63,000 more people died in the first 10 months of the pandemic in England and Wales than would usually be expected to die from any cause between March and December. This reduced life expectancy in 2020."

The demographers found from the first death from COVID last March to 20 November, there were more than 57,419 excess deaths in England and Wales—a 15.1% increase in deaths compared with the expected level. But the researchers have extended their timeframe with more recent data and estimate that, to the end of December, the number of excess deaths in England and Wales grew by another 5,000 in the last five weeks of the year to nearly 63,000.

One of Leverhulme team, José Manuel Aburto says, "In 2020, life expectancy for both men and women reduced by over a year, wiping out gains made on life expectancy in the past decade. Men experienced greater losses in life expectancy, and experienced higher [death](#) rates than women at all ages over the pandemic."

Ridhi Kashyap adds, "The magnitude of these losses in life expectancy...is truly unprecedented."

The study also shows, to 20 November, male excess deaths accounted for 55.4% (31,791 deaths). Men in all [age groups](#) accounted for more of the excess deaths than women.

There was also clear evidence [older adults](#) accounted for most excess deaths. Among the groups 75–85 and 85 and older, there were 17.2% and 13.7% more deaths than expected.

The number of deaths among middle-aged adults

and younger retired people, between 45–64 and 64–74 years of age, respectively were 17.6% and 16.0% above the baseline.

But, the researchers say, "We estimate no excess deaths among those younger than 15 years. Meanwhile, the 15–44-year-old age group saw 652 excess deaths (6.2%) above the expected level.

The researchers show how these excess deaths, to 20 November, had major implications for life expectancy between 2019 and 2020. According to the paper, "Life expectancy dropped a staggering 0.9 and 1.2 years for women and men, respectively, between these years."

But, the team believes, these figures increased further, so that, by the end of December the impact on life expectancy was -1.0 and -1.3 respectively.

The research was published in the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, titled "Estimating the burden of the COVID-19 [pandemic](#) on mortality, [life expectancy](#) and lifespan inequality in England and Wales: a population-level analysis."

More information: Jose Manuel Aburto et al. Estimating the burden of the COVID-19 pandemic on mortality, life expectancy and lifespan inequality in England and Wales: a population-level analysis, *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* (2021). [DOI: 10.1136/jech-2020-215505](https://doi.org/10.1136/jech-2020-215505)

Provided by University of Oxford

APA citation: 63,000 extra deaths and a year off life expectancy—COVID in 2020 in England and Wales (2021, January 27) retrieved 14 April 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-01-extra-deaths-year-life-expectancy-covid.html>

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