

# COVID death rates 10 times higher in countries where most are overweight: report

4 March 2021, by Ernie Mundell and Robin Foster



In a finding that suggests overweight people should be prioritized for COVID-19 vaccines, a new report released Thursday shows the risk of death from coronavirus infection is about 10 times higher in countries where most of the population is overweight.

The World Obesity Federation report found that 88 percent of deaths due to COVID-19 in the first year of the pandemic were in countries where more than half of the population is classified as overweight, the *Washington Post* reported. Having a body mass index (BMI) above 25 is considered overweight.

The results prompted the London-based federation to urge governments to prioritize overweight and obese people for both coronavirus testing and vaccinations, the *Post* reported.

Among the nations with overweight populations above the 50 percent threshold were also those with some of the largest proportions of coronavirus

deaths—including countries such as Britain, Italy and the United States, the *Post* reported. In the United States, nearly three-quarters of the population is considered overweight or obese, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. So far, more than 518,000 Americans have died from COVID-19.

Conversely, in countries where less than half of the adult population is classified as overweight, the risk of death from COVID-19 was about one-tenth of the levels in countries with higher shares of overweight adults. A higher BMI was also associated with increased risk of hospitalization, admission to intensive or critical care and the need for mechanically assisted ventilation, the *Post* said.

These findings were fairly uniform across the globe, the report said. In fact, increased body weight was the second greatest predictor—after old age—of hospitalization and higher risk of death of COVID-19.

To reach that conclusion, the researchers examined mortality data on 160 countries from Johns Hopkins University and the World Health Organization. Of the 2.5 million COVID-19 deaths reported by the end of February, 2.2 million were in countries where more than half the population is overweight, *CNN* reported.

Every country where less than 40% of the population was overweight had a COVID-19 death rate of no more than 10 people per 100,000.

But in countries where more than 50% of the population was overweight, the COVID-19 death rate was much higher—more than 100 per 100,000.

"An overweight population is an unhealthy population, and a pandemic waiting to happen," the group wrote in its report.

**All American adults can get vaccines by end of**

## May: Biden

The United States is now poised to have enough COVID-19 vaccines for every American adult by the end of May, President Joe Biden said this week.

The announcement, which came during a brief speech at the White House on Tuesday, accelerates the country's vaccination goals by two months.

"As a consequence of the stepped-up process that I've ordered and just outlined, this country will have enough vaccine supply—I'll say it again—for every adult in America by the end of May," Biden said. "By the end of May. That's progress—important progress."

### How was it possible to speed up the U.S. vaccine rollout?

Biden said his administration provided support to Johnson & Johnson so the company and its partners can make vaccines around the clock, *The New York Times* reported. In addition to that, the administration brokered a deal in which the pharmaceutical giant Merck & Co. would help manufacture the newly approved Johnson & Johnson single-shot coronavirus vaccine.

Although its own attempt at making a COVID-19 vaccine failed, Merck is the world's second-largest vaccine manufacturer, according to the *Times*. White House officials described the partnership between the two competitors as historic and said it harkens back to the wartime manufacturing campaigns that former President Franklin D. Roosevelt put into place.

Biden also said Tuesday that he wanted all teachers to receive at least one shot by the end of this month, the *Times* reported.

Biden's announcement came days after the U.S. Food and Drug Administration authorized the emergency use of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. As of Thursday, 80.5 million Americans had been vaccinated, with nearly 27 million getting their second shot.

Even as vaccinations ramp up, public health officials worry about another surge of coronavirus cases, as new, more infectious variants emerge and states like Texas and Mississippi lift their mask mandates and roll back many of their coronavirus restrictions. Although cases have dropped significantly since January, they are now leveling off, the *Times* reported.

"We cannot let our guard down now or assure that victory is inevitable," Biden said Tuesday. "We can't assume that."

### U.S. will stick with two doses of Pfizer, Moderna vaccines: Fauci

The United States will stick with its plan to give millions of Americans two doses of the Pfizer and Moderna coronavirus vaccines, Dr. Anthony Fauci said Monday.

The nation's top infectious diseases expert told the *Post* that shifting to a single-dose strategy for those two vaccines could leave people less protected, allow more contagious variants to spread and make Americans already hesitant to get the shots even more wary.

"We're telling people [two shots] is what you should do ... and then we say, 'Oops, we changed our mind?'" Fauci said. "I think that would be a messaging challenge, to say the least."

Fauci said he spoke on Monday with health officials in the United Kingdom, who are delaying second doses to give more people shots more quickly. He said that although he understands the strategy, it wouldn't make sense in America. "We both agreed that both of our approaches were quite reasonable," Fauci told the *Post*.

Some public health experts have asked U.S. policymakers to reconsider whether millions of doses intended as second shots could be distributed as first doses instead—to offer at least some protection to a greater number of people. The issue gained steam after a CDC advisory committee on Monday tackled the question while approving Johnson & Johnson's single-shot coronavirus [vaccine](#).

About 80 percent of adults have yet to get a single dose, according to CDC data.

Fauci told the *Post* the science shows that a two-shot regimen creates enough protection to fend off more contagious coronavirus variants, while a single shot could leave Americans at risk from these variants. There is insufficient data showing how long the immunity provided by one shot would last. "You don't know how durable that protection is," he noted.

Fauci also argued that Pfizer's and Moderna's recent commitment to deliver 220 million total doses by the end of March, in addition to Johnson & Johnson's pledge to deliver nearly 20 million shots this month, should make the issue moot.

"Very quickly the gap between supply and demand is going to be diminished and then overcome in this country," he said. "The rationale for a single dose—and use all your doses for the single dose—is when you have a very severe gap between supply and demand."

### **A global scourge**

By Thursday, the U.S. coronavirus case count passed 28.8 million while the death toll passed 518,000, according to a *Times* tally. On Thursday, the top five states for coronavirus infections were: California with nearly 3.6 million cases; Texas with nearly 2.7 million cases; Florida with over 1.9 million cases; New York with over 1.6 million cases; and Illinois with nearly 1.2 million cases.

Curbing the spread of the coronavirus in the rest of the world remains challenging.

In India, the [coronavirus](#) case count was more than 11.1 million by Thursday, a Johns Hopkins University tally showed. Brazil had over 10.7 million cases and more than 259,000 deaths as of Thursday, the Hopkins tally showed.

Worldwide, the number of reported infections passed 115.3 million on Thursday, with over 2.5 million deaths recorded, according to the Hopkins tally.

**More information:** The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on the [new coronavirus](#).

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