

Excess deaths due to pandemic much higher than reported COVID toll: WHO

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Up to three times more people have died due to the pandemic than indicated by the officially reported COVID deaths, the World Health Organization said Friday.

So far, more than 3.4 million deaths worldwide have officially been attributed to COVID-19 since the disease first surfaced in China in late 2019.

But according to a global health statistics report from the WHO, far more people have died that would otherwise not have, had it not been for the pandemic, either due to COVID or because they could not get treatment for other ailments.

"Total deaths are at least two to three times higher than officially reported," Samira Asma, the WHO assistant director-general in charge of data, told reporters.

In 2020, the report found there had been at least three million excess deaths due directly or indirectly to COVID-19, while the official number of COVID deaths was 1.8 million at the end of the year.

Asked how many excess deaths could be attributed to the pandemic today, Asma said that "I think safely, about six to eight million deaths could be an estimate, with a cautionary note."

The WHO was working with countries "to understand the true human toll of the [pandemic](#) so we can be better prepared for the next emergency," she said.

The discrepancy is due to a number of factors, including lagging reporting on COVID deaths in a number of countries; the fact that many people early on died of COVID without being tested; and also that many were unable to get treatment for other diseases and conditions due to lockdown measures.

"Excess mortality gives us a better picture, because it captures both of these direct and indirect effects," WHO data analyst William Msemburi told reporters.

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