UK coronavirus death toll passes 26,000 as government admits to 4,000 fatalities outside hospitals

Robert Stevens
30 April 2020

The UK coronavirus death toll reached 26,097 yesterday.

Confirming the naked criminality of the Johnson government's pursuit of its "herd immunity" policy, it admitted that an additional 3,811 deaths took place between March 2 and April 28. Around 70 percent of these were "outside hospital settings," mainly in care homes and private residences.

In addition to the 3,811 deaths, a further 765 fatalities were reported in the 24 hours to 5 p.m. Tuesday, of which around 600 died in hospital. Deaths in hospitals in England alone are approaching 20,000 (19,740).

The UK is fast becoming the centre of the pandemic in Europe and is set to surpass the 27,682 deaths already recorded in Italy. Italy's death toll is the second worst in the world after the United States, which has 61,656 deaths.

The government is only now releasing the number of deaths in care homes due to growing public outrage over elderly and vulnerable people being allowed to die without any protection, as the coronavirus ripped through residential homes that have been turned into killing fields.

Despite its admission of thousands more deaths outside hospitals, the government is still vastly under-reporting the true number of COVID-19 fatalities. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has already reported 6,000 deaths in care homes, and in just the two weeks to April 24, the Care Quality Commission was notified of 4,343 deaths from COVID-19 in care homes.

In Scotland, deaths as a result of COVID-19 account for half of reported fatalities in care homes. The National Records of Scotland reported Wednesday that by April 26 there had been 2,272 COVID-19-linked deaths. Of these, 338 of the 656 deaths recorded between April 20 and 26 were in care homes.

Speaking on *BBC Radio Four* Tuesday, Professor Spiegelhalter, a University of Cambridge statistician, said, "What we are seeing is a massive increase in deaths. … While COVID deaths in hospitals have been steadily declining since April 8 and now number around 400-450 a day, new Care Quality Commission data show that last week there were around 350-400 COVID deaths in English care-homes each day. When we add in deaths at home, this suggests there are now about as many COVID deaths out of hospital as in hospital. And while hospital deaths are steadily decreasing, there is no sign yet that we are past the peak in care homes."

The government's daily figures have never included the figures recorded by the ONS of more than 880 people with coronavirus dying at home in England and Wales since the first death in the UK at the end of February. The ONS has also recorded 190 coronavirus deaths in hospices.

Even the pro-Tory *Daily Mail* reported *Wednesday* that the new "tally still falls thousands short of the reality. … The Government will only include people who have tested positive for the virus in its statistics, despite rationing almost all the testing kits to hospitals for the first month of the outbreak, meaning thousands of people may have died without ever being diagnosed."

The Tories are anticipating thousands more deaths. Asked to respond by *Sky News* reporter Kay Burley to the statement that "our death toll in Britain is on track to being the worst in Europe," Environment Secretary George Eustice replied, "We've been on similar trajectories to France and Italy. … It may well be that we are, who knows, we don't know that at the moment.

Earlier this week, *Financial Times* analysis of ONS data concluded that a "conservative estimate" of "UK excess deaths by April 21 was 41,102."

© World Socialist Web Site

Even as the real picture of the catastrophic loss of human life emerges, the Tory government, in alliance with the Labour Party and the unions, is moving ahead with a "mass return to work" policy, as the goal is referred to by the Trades Union Congress.

The government's official stance is that no major decision to end the lockdown will be taken before the next review date on May 7. But behind the scenes, every mechanism is being put in place to ensure a de facto return. On Wednesday, the *Daily Telegraph* reported that Boris Johnson "is preparing to water down [lockdown] restrictions within days." The newspaper explains that of the five tests that were set out earlier this month to be passed before easing the lockdown, four have been or are close to being met.

One of the "tests" is a "'sustained and consistent' fall in the daily death rate"—but no matter! The newspaper also reports, "The fifth hurdle, which ministers have always said is the most important, was described in official government documents on Monday as a confidence that "any adjustments to the current measures will not risk a second peak of infections."

Such niceties will not be allowed to stand in the way of sending millions back to work, with the *Telegraph* noting, "Yesterday the wording was changed to say the aim was to avoid a second peak 'that overwhelms the NHS'—making it easier for ministers to say the test had been met. Matt Hancock, the Health Secretary, has repeatedly trumpeted the fact that the NHS has never been overwhelmed during the whole of the current crisis, which means that ministers could now argue that the NHS would be able to cope even if infections rose sharply again."

The underfunded and destaffed NHS has faced a constant crisis in the face of the coronavirus that has cost the lives of many doctors and nurses who have not been provided with the necessary personal protective equipment (PPE). *Nursing Notes* reported that by Wednesday morning, "at least 148 health and social care workers are now believed to have died of COVID-19."

A raft of companies, including high street chains, major manufacturers and building companies, have already opened or are planning to soon reopen. The government announced yesterday that with immediate effect, all "non-essential" retailers would be permitted to operate click-and-collect services—with the only proviso that their customers remain outside the store in a queue before collecting goods.

The *Telegraph* reported it had "learnt that ministers are in talks with business leaders over a flexible furlough scheme that will allow them to bring their workforce back part-time and share the cost with the Treasury, which could form a central pillar of a plan to get Britain back to work."

Central to the back-to-work plan is for schools to be reopened. Education Minister Gavin Williamson said yesterday that pupils would return to schools in a "phased approach."

So compromised is the Tory government that Johnson depends on the support of the Labour Party and the trade unions to spearhead the back-to-work campaign. Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer took to the pages of the *Financial Times* on Tuesday to insist the lockdown must end, declaring, "If lockdown is necessary for that [reducing the COVID-19 infection rate], we support it. But we can't park the next set of decisions. They are in danger of being slow on their exit strategy."

He asked, "Are you going to prioritise schools? Which bits of the economy do you want to ensure are able to work most quickly[?] … All of the exit strategies I've seen [in other countries] have given an indication of what might happen with schools, what might happen in business sectors, and we need to have the same conversation."

The trade unions are involved in high-level talks with ministers and business leaders in seven sectors of the economy in organising the back-to-work operation. On Monday, the Trades Union Congress issued a 23-page report, "Preparing for the return to work outside the home: a trade union approach." The document represents the "TUC's initial thinking on how to manage the mass return to work at the end or easing of lockdown."

The needs of British capitalism, not the health of millions of people, are the main priority of the trade union bureaucracy, which declares, "Working people will need to return to work outside the home at some point in the coming months. The TUC does not take a position on the science of how to manage a pandemic, or the speed or nature of any return to work. It is invidious to argue about the relative priority of public health or economic growth: both are important to the wellbeing of working people."

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site