

# UK coronavirus death rate at record high in Europe as fatalities pass 32,000

Robert Stevens  
6 May 2020

The UK's coronavirus death toll is now the highest in Europe, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

By Tuesday morning, the death toll in Italy—which was previously the highest in Europe to date—reached 29,315, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University. Just hours later, the ONS announced total COVID-19 deaths in the UK had reached 32,313—making Britain the first European country to exceed the horrific milestone of 30,000 deaths.

The ONS figures are based on deaths where COVID-19 is mentioned on the death certificate. In contrast, the Conservative government manipulates its figures by only counting those cases where COVID-19 is recorded as the cause of death. However, the 693 new COVID-19 deaths announced yesterday by the government also brought the UK's manipulated total to the highest in Europe at 29,427.

Thousands of new coronavirus cases continue to be reported every day in Britain, with another 4,406 yesterday and a total of 194,990. This is under conditions in which only a tiny fraction of the population, including around 10 million “essential” workers, have been tested. The UK has tested just 20,385 people per 1 million of the population—a lower rate than the United States, Spain, Italy, Germany, Belgium, Portugal, Russia and Canada.

According to the ONS analysis, COVID-19 was mentioned on 29,648 death certificates in England and Wales by May 2, with the remaining deaths registered in Scotland and Northern Ireland that mention COVID-19 bringing the UK total to 32,313. The ONS revealed that 7,713 of the deaths in England and Wales occurred outside hospitals. These included 5,890 in care homes (up from just over 3,000 the previous week), 1,306 in private homes, 301 in hospices, 105 in

other communal establishments, and 111 elsewhere.

The ONS report stands in stark contrast to the figures handed out for months by Downing Street in its daily press briefings.

On April 24, the government reported a total of 19,506 deaths, but yesterday's ONS figure was 42 percent higher than the number released by the Department of Health on that day. At that stage, the Johnson government was only counting deaths related to coronavirus of those who passed away in hospital.

The *Daily Mail* cited the assessment of a former ONS health analyst, Jamie Jenkins, who estimates that the numbers of “excess deaths”, i.e. those above the statistical average for the time of year, meaning that the coronavirus death toll was more than 45,000.

Last week, a *Financial Times* assessment of ONS data available at that point, estimated a death toll of at least 47,000. The paper reported that it drew this conclusion based on a figure of “almost 30,000 excess deaths by mid-April across the UK...” The FT noted that “Much of the increase in deaths has been recorded in care homes”, with the coronavirus appearing “to be killing more than twice the number of people recorded in daily figures from hospitals.” By April 17, 7,316 deaths were recorded in care homes, compared with an average of 2,154 for that week over the past five years.

Yesterday, based on the new ONS data, the FT upgraded its estimated UK death toll from the virus to 53,800. It also cited yesterday's comments of David Spiegelhalter, professor of public understanding of risk at Cambridge university: “I can be confident now . . . that there are more Covid deaths happening outside hospitals than in hospital.”

Mehring Books, the publishing arm of the Socialist Equality Party (US), is proud to announce the publication in epub format of Volume 1 of *COVID*,

*Capitalism, and Class War: A Social and Political Chronology of the Pandemic*, a compilation of the *World Socialist Web Site's* coverage of this global crisis.

Despite the UK approaching the highest number of deaths in Europe, newspaper headlines in the right-wing media Tuesday morning trumpeted Tory government's propaganda that the UK was past the peak of the virus and on a "downward slope"—to justify the Tories back-to-work agenda.

The *Daily Mail* front page read, "Glimmer of hope as death toll falls", *Sky News* led with the almost identical headline, "Coronavirus: Glimmer of hope as total number of UK deaths decline from peak, new figures suggest". It noted a "slight" fall "in the total number of deaths registered in England and Wales in the week ending April 24—driven by a decrease in the number of hospital deaths."

Sky focussed on a small fall in deaths compared to the previous week. The broadcaster reported that the seven days to April 24, "saw the first decrease in the weekly total number of registered deaths since March 20. The number of deaths registered in the week to April 24 was 354 less compared with the previous week."

Despite all such attempts to conceal the real number of fatalities, the true facts are emerging in the UK and in every country. On Monday, it was reported that Italy's mortality rate due to COVID-19 was far higher than that officially acknowledged by the government—which does not include deaths where COVID-19 was the *suspected* cause.

According to research issued by the Italian statistics bureau ISTAT—based on monitoring 86 percent of the population from February 21, when the first COVID-19 deaths occurred, until March 31—nationwide fatalities were up 49 percent, compared with the average of the previous five years. The country saw 25,354 "excess deaths"; while the Civil Protection Agency registered COVID-19 as the official cause for 13,710, around 11,600 deaths were unaccounted for.



To contact the WSWs and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)**