

Italian statistics agency reveals real coronavirus death toll is higher by 12,000

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The Italian statistics bureau ISTAT reported on Monday that the real coronavirus death toll in the country is far higher than the official count of more than 29,000 people.

ISTAT's report was produced together with the country's National Health Institute, and based on an analysis of the total death rate across the Italian population, spanning the period from February 21, when the first coronavirus death was reported, through to the end of March.

There were 90,946 deaths reported from all causes over this period, compared to 65,592 in 2019. Of the difference, some 25,354 additional deaths, just over 54 percent were confirmed COVID-19 cases, and added to the authorities' tally. But due to the government's refusal to conduct large-scale testing for the disease, an unknown number of thousands more died without ever even being tested for the virus.

By breaking down the excess death toll by geographical region, the study indicates that the rise was overwhelmingly attributable to COVID-19. More than ninety percent of the "excess" deaths at the national level (comparing March 2019 to March 2020) were concentrated in the regions hardest hit by the pandemic: 37 northern provinces, plus Pesaro and Urbino.

Deaths in these areas more than doubled to 49,351 compared to 2019. Taking the years 2015-2019 as a base average, the study found that the death rate increased by the following amounts in the regions where the largest coronavirus cluster occurred: in Bergamo, 568 percent; in Cremona, 391 percent; in Lodi, 371 percent; in Brescia, 291 percent; in Piacenza, 264 percent; in Parma, 208 percent; in Lecco, 174 percent; in Pavia, 133 percent; in Mantua, 122 percent; in Pesaro and Urbino, 120 percent.

The report concludes that in addition to the 13,700 deaths reported up to March 30 from COVID-19, an additional 11,600 people died either directly from the virus or from the breakdown of the health system in the areas hardest hit. To this must be added the many thousands or tens of thousands more who have died in the period since March 31.

This is not the only report making clear that the official death toll is a vast underestimate. A mathematical study was published on April 20 by three scientists from the University of California-Berkeley, based on a statistical analysis of excess death rates (comparing 2020 to the period of 2015-2019) in Italy, broken down by population age group.

The authors concluded that for the population aged under 70, the official death count was a reasonable estimate of the total number of deaths, but that it significantly undercounts the 70-plus age group. They estimate that by April 20, the real number of deaths was 52,000 (with an uncertainty range of 2,000), more than double the official number of 24,114 that had been reported at that point.

The Conte government's own figures are a deliberate cover-up. It has not implemented large-scale testing and does not want the full scale of the disaster to be known because it is implicated in the death toll.

The country entered the coronavirus pandemic with just 8.6 intensive care beds per 1,000 people in the population. Savage austerity led by the Democratic Party over more than a decade under the demands of the European Union slashed the budget of the health care system.

An April 26 report by AP documents the systematic refusal of authorities to take necessary actions to prevent the spread of the virus, including rejecting the recommendations of national health authorities. Their

decisions were conditioned at every point by the overriding concern to prevent any impact on corporate profits.

By March 2, the National Health Institute had recommended the full lock-down of Alzano and Nembro. The lock-down was never implemented, and the disease was allowed to spread another week uninhibited until a full confinement was imposed on March 7 across Lombardy. Even then, however, non-essential production was kept open, which was only stopped due to the eruption of nationwide wildcat strikes by workers demanding the idling of non-essential plants, in defiance of the governments and the pro-corporate trade unions.

“The army was there, prepared to do a total closure, and if it had been done immediately maybe they could have stopped the contagion in the rest of Lombardy,” Dr. Guido Marinoni, head of the association of doctors in Bergamo province, told AP. “This wasn’t done, and they took softer measures in all of Lombardy, and this allowed for the spread.” The Lombardy region is a major economic center, responsible for more than a fifth of Italian GDP.

From the start, the response of the Italian ruling class, like its counterparts throughout Europe and America, has not been oriented to saving lives, but to guarding profits. It is responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands, and if allowed to continue with these policies, will oversee the deaths of an untold number more.

Even as the real scale of the coronavirus pandemic’s impact is being covered up, Italian authorities are moving to a full re-opening of the economy. While trillions of dollars have been used across America and Europe to prop up share markets and stock prices for the financial elite, the working class is being forced to return to work to continue producing profits.

This week, all non-essential production began to re-open across the country, with millions of workers pushed back to work. Restaurants and cafés are already operating take-out services. Beginning on May 18, the government has announced that all restaurants could fully open.

On Monday, a report was released by Imperial College of London, using data from Italy, which predicts that the end to the country’s 60-day nationwide lockdown will lead to tens of thousands of

additional deaths of people who would otherwise have been saved.

The report provides a region-by-region analysis of movement of the population using Google location data, both before and after the beginning of lockdown measures. They model the transmission rate of the virus (the average number of people that every infected person infects) as a function of this overall population mobility.

The analysis concludes that even a 20 percent increase in total mobility in the population compared to lockdown would lead to an additional 3,000 to 5,000 more deaths than would otherwise have occurred if confinement had been maintained.

If mobility increases by 40 percent, the study estimates that the total number of deaths will increase by anywhere from 10,000 to 23,000.

These are, again, not the total number of deaths, but only the additional deaths that would otherwise have been avoided if confinement had been maintained. The capitalist class’s response to the pandemic is a policy of mass murder. As the *World Socialist Web Site* explained in its Perspective yesterday: “It is becoming increasingly clear that the fight against the pandemic is inseparable from a fight against the capitalist system. The conflict between the needs of society and the profit system is not just a theoretical question. It is demonstrated in practice every single day.”



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