

# Nearly 65,000 COVID-19 deaths in UK according to Financial Times

Barry Mason  
4 June 2020

There have been at least 64,500 deaths in the UK linked to coronavirus, according to modelling by the *Financial Times*.

Its figures were based on those released Tuesday by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The ONS found that deaths registered in England and Wales with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 reached 44,401 by May 22. When figures for Northern Ireland are added, the total reaches just over 50,000.

On Tuesday, the government announced a further 324 deaths, meaning that even its own heavily manipulated death toll calculation has reached almost 40,000 (39,369). These are the highest number of COVID-19 deaths of any country except the United States.

The data used by the Johnson government to compile its daily figures only includes people who died with positive test results confirmed by a Public Health or National Health Service laboratory. They do not, it states, include “deaths of people who had COVID-19 but had not been tested, people who were tested positive only via a non-NHS or Public Health laboratory, or people who had been tested negative and subsequently caught the virus and died.”

*Financial Times* economics editor Chris Giles tweeted of the ONS data, “Following today’s official excess deaths figures and hospital data, a cautious estimate for the total UK excess deaths during the coronavirus pandemic up to 2 June is 64,500. Of these 61,920 have happened, the rest are estimates.”

The *FT*’s modelling follows an extensive survey of 19 countries carried out by the newspaper last week. It found that the UK was only behind Spain in its COVID-19 deaths in Europe, according to “excess mortality figures.” The UK’s death rate from the disease was 891 deaths per million, while Spain’s was 921 per million. In each country the figure was based

on the number of “excess deaths” since the week ending March 20. The UK was in first place internationally until May 21, when Spain revised sharply upwards its mortality estimates, adding 12,000 to its toll of excess deaths, taking them to 43,000.

Excess deaths are defined as the number of deaths in a certain period compared to a five-year average. The *FT* noted, “The data were compiled from national statistical agencies for 19 countries for which sufficient information exists to make robust comparisons. The figures include all of the European countries hit hard by coronavirus.”

The excess deaths method of compiling figures for COVID-19 is internationally recognised as the best. The Heath Foundation explains, “Excess deaths is a better measure than the COVID-19 deaths of the pandemic’s total mortality. It measures the additional deaths in a given time period compared to the number usually expected and does not depend on how COVID-19 deaths are recorded.”

The *FT* highlighted the fact that in absolute terms the number of excess deaths in the UK is the highest in Europe, and internationally is only second to the US. The figures for percentage increases in excess deaths in the UK is the highest in Europe and second only to Peru internationally.

The newspaper report was accompanied by graphs showing that the rise in excess deaths was spread across all regions of the UK. This was unlike Italy, where the impact of the pandemic was concentrated in the Lombardy area. In France, the impact was mainly in two regions, including one around Paris.

An important graph shows the number of excess deaths related to how soon lockdowns were imposed. There is a strong correlation between the date of lockdown imposed and the number of likely COVID-19

cases that followed. It is further evidence that the Johnson government's "herd immunity" policy and refusal to impose lockdown until March 23 was an act of mass murder.

Natalie Dean, assistant professor of Biostatistics at the University of Florida, told the *FT*, "I was very surprised by the delayed response in the UK. Given what we were observing in Italy at the time and that the UK was on the exact same trajectory, had the same very steep rise, I was surprised to see discussion about waiting. There was an immediate need to stop what was happening."

The government attempted to dismiss the *FT*'s assessment, with a spokesperson claiming it was "wrong and premature to be drawing conclusions at this stage." The official said that one of the reasons was that excess deaths should be adjusted for age. The newspaper replied, "The *FT* analysis shows that the UK's excess deaths figure remains the highest whether younger people are excluded or the analysis is limited to pensioners."

The latest figures released by the ONS on the number of excess deaths shows a decline. For the week ending May 22, the figure for excess deaths was 2,348 compared to 12,000 at the height of the pandemic. However, these figures relate to a week before the lockdown measures were eased, forcing millions back to work and then the reopening of targeted schools.

A June 1 *Health Service Journal* article on the latest figures of deaths from COVID-19 in English hospitals noted that in the northwest and London the rate of decline is beginning to slow, while in the southwest cases are on the rise.

The Johnson government claimed it was possible to ease the lockdown because it had a world beating test and trace system in place. The system began on May 28, but Health Secretary Matt Hancock has not provided any figures on its operation. On June 2, *Channel 4* revealed leaked figures showing that from its inception on May 28 until May 31, only 4,456 cases of COVID-19 were reported to the test and trace service across England. Of these, 1,831 either self-registered on the system or were contacted by contact tracers. They were able to provide the names of 4,634 contacts, but the tracers were only able to contact 1,749.

Anthony Costello, Professor of Global Health at

University College London who is member of the Independent Sage group, described the test and trace system as "not fit for purpose yet."

The government recruited 25,000 contact tracers. While some are health workers, many have been recruited through call centre recruitment campaigns. Under the system, people testing positive for COVID-19 must complete an online form. They will be asked for details of family members who live with them, plus anyone they have been within two metres of for 15 minutes or more.

One contact tracer told the pro-Tory *Daily Mail*, "It is so chaotic. You complete the online training but that doesn't register on the system. You can have a problem with a log-in to one of the many different systems we are using, and you are put in a queue with upwards of 300 people for help."

The government put great store in developing a mobile phone app to be able to track and trace possible COVID-19 victims. It was released with serious flaws and bugs. Seven major problems were identified by a team of security experts, including several with serious implications for infringements of privacy and civil liberties. The trial of the software on the Isle of Wight proved ineffectual and inconclusive.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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