

UK passes 100,000 COVID-19 deaths

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Deaths from COVID-19 in Britain have passed the 100,000 mark, according to analysis from government and statistical agencies, counting cases where the virus was noted on the death certificate.

The grim milestone was reached with the 1,564 deaths recorded on Wednesday—the highest daily death toll yet during the pandemic—for a total of 101,160. Yesterday another 1,248 deaths and 48,682 new infections were announced. Total infections are now well over 3.2 million in Britain.

The *Guardian* reported, “Almost one in every 660 people in the UK have died from Covid or Covid-related causes so far during the pandemic—or about one-in-six of all deaths. The UK has one of the worst coronavirus mortality rates in the world, at 151 per 100,000 people.”

The Conservative government only counts fatalities within 28 days of a positive COVID test, but even by this criterion 86,015 lives have been lost.

Public Health England confirmed that there have already been more deaths in the second wave of the pandemic than in the first. London and the South East of England have been devastated in recent weeks, with London Mayor Sadiq Khan revealing Thursday that more than 10,000 have succumbed to the deadly disease in the capital.

The staggering loss of life was underscored Wednesday, with the Office for National Statistics confirming that 2020 saw the largest increase in excess deaths since the Second World War. Only the months from January to November 2020 were covered by the ONS data, but in that period 697,000 deaths were recorded—nearly 85,000 more than would be expected based on the average over the last five years.

The numbers hospitalised by the virus have reached record levels. On Monday, 36,489 people were in hospital, up 5,872 on the same day last week, and 3,496 COVID-19 patients were in ventilation beds Tuesday.

The hospital admission rate for COVID-19 rose significantly this week to 37.2 per 100,000, compared with 29.5 per 100,000 the previous week.

Yesterday, *Sky News* reported from the children’s ward at St Mary’s hospital in London which had been cleared of children and was now full of COVID-19 victims with almost all on life support. Of the 13 beds, there were 12 patients under sedation and intubated.

Interviewed by *ITV News*, UK Chief Scientific Adviser Sir Patrick Vallance warned, “I’m afraid we’re in for a period of high death numbers that’s gonna carry on for some weeks. It’s not going to come down quickly, even if the measures that are in place now start to reduce the infection numbers. So we’re in for a pretty grim period I’m afraid.”

According to a report in the *Guardian*, in a policy that threatens further death and suffering, thousands of hospital patients in England are to be discharged early to hotels or their own homes to free up beds for COVID-19 patients needing critical care. The newspaper cited a senior source in the NHS who said this would create “extra emergency contingency capacity” and prevent parts of the National Health Service (NHS) collapsing.

This scandal was soon outstripped by an even greater threat to life posed by the decision of the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) to discharge COVID patients from hospitals into care homes without tests. The *Guardian* reported Thursday that guidance issued by the DHSC declares that COVID-positive patients in England who have been in isolation in hospital for 14 days “are not considered to pose an infection risk” and do not require retesting. If they are not showing new symptoms and are thought not to have had fresh exposure to the virus, they can be moved directly to care homes from hospital.

This was the same murderous policy imposed by the Conservative government in the first wave of the crisis,

which turned care homes into killing fields taking the lives of 18,562 people between March 2 and June 12 last year in England.

The vast numbers hospitalised during the pandemic threaten an even greater public health catastrophe. NHS England records show a record almost 4.5 million people were waiting to start hospital treatment in England at the end of November 2020, the worst month for medical backlogs since records began. The number of people having to wait more than 52 weeks to start hospital treatment in England stood at 192,169 in November 2020, the highest number for any calendar month since May 2008 and more than a hundred times the 1,400 in that position a year before.

Tens of thousands of NHS staff are off work, either ill with the virus or on self-isolation, worsening the crisis facing hospitals. NHS England found that over 5,000 patients waited longer than an hour to be handed over from ambulance teams to accident and emergency staff at hospitals in England in the week to January 10.

A series of temporary morgues and makeshift burial sites are being constructed nationwide, including the largest, a mortuary at Breakspear crematorium in Hillingdon, north London, with a capacity for 672 bodies that can be expanded to take more if needed.

Only a tiny fraction of the UK population has been vaccinated, with just 2.6 million people (4 percent) having received at least one of the two necessary doses by Tuesday. Vallance told ITV, “we don’t know for sure” if the Pfizer, AstraZeneca and Moderna vaccines will work on the recently discovered Brazilian and South African mutations of COVID-19.

There are no plans to vaccinate young people, with the Tories’ herd immunity agenda spelled out again by Dr Mary Ramsay, head of immunisation at Public Health England, on Wednesday. She told Parliament’s Science and Technology Committee, “We may need to accept, if the vaccine doesn’t prevent transmission, that we’re going to protect the people who are really vulnerable and going to die and have serious disease, but we allow the disease to circulate in younger people where it’s not causing much harm.”

As far as the ruling elite are concerned, workers lives are expendable, with the overruling goal of all policy that of keeping the capitalist economy afloat and profits rolling in for big business. This week saw millions of people responding with shock and anger as the

appalling contents of the “food parcels” being delivered to the families of 1.7 million schoolchildren who receive free school meals.

Despite previous U-turns, the government plans to end ongoing food support for the poorest children during school holidays. Yesterday, it emerged that the Department for Education (DfE) has informed headteachers at schools in England, “Schools do not need to provide lunch parcels or vouchers during the February half-term.”

A Trades Union Congress survey of 50,000 women revealed that 71 percent of working mothers who asked to be admitted to the government’s furlough scheme, citing childcare reasons due to the closure of schools in this wave of the pandemic, have been refused. This is a blatant flouting of the rules by employers, since the job retention scheme—under which the state pays 80 percent of workers’ wages up to a maximum of £2,500 a month—permits employers to furlough parents not able to work due to a lack of childcare.

The working class must respond to the public health catastrophe by asserting its independent interests to prevent further mass deaths. The response to the pandemic must be taken out of the hands of the criminal Conservative government and its accomplices in the Labour Party and trade union bureaucracy.

All non-essential workplaces must be closed, with living wages provided to all workers, and full compensation provided to small businesses.

The Socialist Equality Party calls for the establishment of rank-and-file committees in every workplace and neighbourhood to fight for effective lockdowns with full income, educational and social support, genuinely safe conditions for key workers, and a functioning test-and trace system—to be funded by seizing the fortunes of the super-rich who have continued to pile up billions more in wealth during the pandemic.



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