

# CDC report: Biggest drop in US life expectancy since World War II

Kate Randall  
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Close to half a million Americans have died in the COVID-19 pandemic and the global death toll stands at nearly 2.5 million. The immense suffering continues unabated as cases climb, reaching more than 110 million worldwide and new and potentially more virulent mutations of the virus circulate.

The US population has had the greatest drop in life expectancy since the 1940s, according to a new study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), while another study has shown that a staggering 20 million years of human life have been lost to the pandemic.

These brutal realities are not simply the result of the lethal virus, but the consequence of a deliberate policy of capitalist governments the world over that have allowed the virus to spread and have even welcomed and promoted its deadly wrath. Those killed include both the young and old, and are disproportionately working class and poor.

If the health and progress of a society is judged by life expectancy, then the US is indeed in the throes of societal decay. The new study from the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) shows that in the first half of 2020, life expectancy at birth for the total US population was 77.8 years, declining by an entire year from 78.8 years in 2019. This is the largest drop in life expectancy since World War II, when it fell by 3 years.

The NCHS cautions that, as dramatic as this drop is, its findings are provisional and based on death certificates that may later be revised up to six months after the end of the data year. The study also does not take into account deaths that occurred in the second half of 2020, when the pandemic took a firm hold in the US South and West.

US life expectancy at birth in the first half of 2020 for

the total population stood at its lowest level since 2006 (77.8 years) and for males (75.1 years). For females, it was at the lowest level since 2007 (80.5 years). Life expectancy for the non-Hispanic black population in the first half of 2020 (72 years) was at its lowest level since 2001.

Undoubtedly contributing to the decline in US life expectancy are so-called deaths of despair, from overdoses, substance abuse-related health problems, and suicides. The CDC found that the twelve-month period ending last June saw a 20 percent jump and includes the highest number of fatal overdoses ever recorded in the US in a single year, 81,003.

These addiction-related fatalities must be seen as a subset of deaths related to the pandemic, which has isolated those in recovery as substance abuse has largely fallen off the radar. Addiction treatment programs have been cut at a time when they are needed more than ever, due to the isolation and financial insecurity fueled by the pandemic.

Another study, from *Nature*'s "Scientific Reports," analyzed data from more than 1.2 million people from 81 countries who have died from COVID-19 so far. The authors, from Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona, Spain and the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research in Rostock, Germany, calculated "years of life lost" (YLL), or the difference between a person's age at death and his or her life expectancy, using data on life expectancy in these countries.

The authors' research found that a staggering 20.5 million years of life have been lost to COVID-19 globally. As the deaths in the 81 countries number 1,279,866—and current official global deaths stand at nearly 2.5 million—the years of life lost are undoubtedly far higher.

This study contradicts the claims put forward by authorities that the pandemic is taking the lives of older individuals who, even without infection by the virus, would have had few life years remaining. Deaths of the elderly have been viewed by the ruling class, both before the pandemic and now, as something to be welcomed, as their continued life and medical care are a drain on the health care system at a time in their lives when they are no longer churning out profits for the financial oligarchy.

According to the “Scientific Reports” study, three-quarters of YLL result from deaths of those below age 75, and almost a third from deaths of those below age 55. In other words, while older people are suffering a disproportionate number of deaths, those below the age of 55 are being robbed of a large percentage of their adult years by the virus.

The study’s authors also acknowledge that their study does not take into account the burden of disability falling upon those who contract the virus and survive, but whose quality of life is impacted by a wide range of debilitating disabilities—both physical and mental—the wide-ranging extent of which is still being investigated.

Taken together, the “Scientific Reports” and NCHS studies reveal the extent of the suffering inflicted on the world’s population, both in deaths and years lost, by the policies of the world’s ruling elites in the pandemic. In the US, the policy of the Biden administration differs little in fundamentals from that of his predecessor Trump.

The response to the pandemic in the United States and countries throughout Europe has been dictated by the mantra of “herd immunity” and the slogan “the cure cannot be worse than the disease,” i.e., that saving human lives cannot get in the way of the accumulation of private profit.

The driving force for the reopening of schools is that they must be reopened so that parents can get back on the job in unsafe factories and workplaces where the virus will continue to spread and infect. But scientific study after study has proven that schools, which lack the most basic safety protections for students and teachers, are a key driver of spread.

In reality, herd immunity means herding students, teachers and other workers into unsafe factories where infections will fester and the death toll will mount in the interest of maintaining the profits of the financial

aristocracy. According to this logic, human life must be subordinated at all costs to the wealth of the financial elite.

Earlier this month, the journal formerly known as the *British Medical Journal* (now the BMJ) published an editorial aptly accusing governments around the world of “social murder” in their response to the pandemic. The BMJ accurately characterized this as a deliberate effort to handicap governments’ responses to the pandemic by promoting the deadly “herd immunity” policy.

As the virus continued to spread and kill millions around the globe, those lockdowns that had been imposed were lifted and the population was encouraged to travel, go to restaurants and attend sporting events. In the US, this included earlier this month the super-spreader Super Bowl in Florida, a hotbed of the pandemic. This has now culminated in the US in the homicidal drive to reopen schools. The pro-capitalist trade unions have been the enforcers of this back-to-school, back-to-work campaign.

The working class must counter this capitalist program of misery and death with a socialist program that places the social interests of the vast majority of the population at its center, harnessing the advances of science and medicine for the good of humankind.



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