

Young Americans are dying at rates not seen since 1953

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A new report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that approximately 19 percent more Americans died in 2020 than in 2019. Researchers also discovered that mortality rates for young adults aged 25 to 34 have skyrocketed in the last decade, reaching levels not seen since 1953.

The year-on-year increase in the mortality rate among young Americans is the largest since 1918, when deaths rose by 30 percent amid the Spanish Flu pandemic. Mortality rates for children and those 65 and older had been in steady decline for the last century until the COVID-19 pandemic, which halted this progress. The mortality rates for those aged 55-64 rose slightly before the coronavirus pandemic, but the 45 to 64 age group still saw a general decline in mortality rates until 2020.

Due to improvements in medical science, the mortality rates for infants have declined spectacularly in recent decades, with infant deaths moving from the group with the highest mortality rate toward the middle of the pack. However, infant mortality in the US has not fallen as quickly as rates in other developed countries. Children aged 5 to 14 have always regularly held the lowest mortality rate, but the decline has stalled in the last decade.

According to the report, those aged 25 through 34 have seen the least improvement of all age groups in recent decades, dying at about the same rate in 2020 as they did in 1953. From 2010 through 2019, death rates among this age group rose by 25.2 percent. This increase, already far worse than that of any other age group in that period, was followed up in 2020 by a staggering 24.5 percent one-year increase, which made for a 55.8 percent rise since 2010.

Based on data going back to 1990, the report documents a public health crisis sweeping the American workforce. The downward trend was

prevalent before the pandemic arrived, but working-age Americans have been deeply affected by the pandemic, the report noted.

“We’re losing more and more Americans in the prime of their lives, in their most productive years, and in their parenting years,” wrote Kathleen Mullan Harris, a sociology professor at the University of North Carolina and chair of the committee that wrote the report.

“Our committee was stunned by this mounting crisis, which will only get worse. The most troubling themes in our report—higher mortality than our peer countries; major racial and ethnic, socio-economic, and geographic disparities; lack of access to health insurance and care—have all been exacerbated by the pandemic” Harris said.

Researchers determined the rising death rate for adult workers was driven by a sharp increase in deaths from drug overdoses, alcohol, suicide, and cardiometabolic conditions. Drug overdoses have been the primary driving factor, with researchers attributing most of the increase in overdose deaths since 2013 to the ongoing opioid pandemic that claims the lives of thousands each year. However, suicide rates also rose from the mid-2000s to the mid-2010s at a concerning rate.

These “deaths of despair” are inextricably linked to the malignant growth of social inequality in American society in the last few decades. Americans under 40 saw their share of US household wealth fall to a record low of 4.3 percent in 2009. Although the current rate increased to 5.9 percent, young adults’ share of wealth is still lower than any time before 2008.

Previous studies reported rising death rates among those with a high school degree or less, and those living in rural areas. The March report indicated the increase in premature death is more widespread, striking

working-age adults in all racial and ethnic groups, and in both rural and metropolitan areas.

The report noted that death rates among black working-age adults have been disproportionately high for years because of inequalities in socioeconomic status, health care, housing, education and other factors. Although progress occurred at the turn of the century in reducing the mortality gap between black and white Americans, death rates in working-age black people are now increasing, effectively erasing that progress.

Drugs and alcohol are major contributors to the rise in working-age mortality. From 1990 to 2017, fatal drug overdoses in working-age Americans increased in every state, but increases were particularly sharp in Appalachia, New England, and the industrial Midwest. The report described the opioid epidemic as a “perfect storm” created by pharmaceutical companies flooding the market with highly addictive and deadly prescriptions, combined with a growing demand for substances to bring relief from physical, mental and psychological pain.

American capitalism has devastated the American working class. Even before the pandemic, young adults in the US experienced much higher mortality rates than their peers in most other wealthy countries.

The increase in deaths, which began in the 1990s, coincides with the ferocious social counterrevolution waged against the American working class over decades. Since the 1980s, workers have seen their real wages steadily decline, and rapid changes in the US economy have devastated families and communities, especially in areas like the Rust Belt and Appalachia where working-age death rates increased the most.

Now, the arrival of the pandemic has exacerbated the social crisis facing American workers. The homicidal pandemic policies of the ruling elite have had severe consequences for workers. Meanwhile, the upper echelons of society have seen their wealth skyrocket during the pandemic, gorging themselves from the deaths of workers like vultures.

Only the organization of the working class independent of the two big business parties and the trade unions that defend and accept their murderous back-to-school and back-to-work policies can reverse this social catastrophe. The working class must counter the capitalist program of misery and death with a socialist program that places the social needs of the vast

majority of the population at its core.



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