

# Official COVID-19 death toll worldwide reaches four million

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Since the first confirmed death from COVID-19, a 61-year-old man who frequented the Hunan wet market in Wuhan, that occurred on January 11, 2020, as of this writing, 541 days and 3,996,185 lives (according to the Worldometer dashboard) have passed, a rate of almost 7,400 lives per day.

By the time the extended July 4 weekend will have concluded, the number of lives lost will have exceeded 4 million confirmed deaths, with the highest death toll in the United States at 621,300 lives, of which almost 200,000 have taken place since Joe Biden became president.

According to a report published in June 2021 by *Think Global Health*, COVID-19 was the fourth leading cause of death globally. It accounted for 1 in 20 deaths (5 percent) of all deaths worldwide since the pandemic erupted in early 2020. If excess death estimates are employed, it would become the third leading cause of death in the world, ahead of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and just behind stroke and heart disease, with “an estimated 7.5 million deaths, or one out of every ten deaths.” (Estimates are based on revised data published by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation)

The report continues, “According to official statistics, COVID-19 was the leading cause of death in France, Spain, England, and several US states. But after accounting for undercounting of COVID-19 deaths, it was the leading cause of death in the United States, Iran, and Italy...”

There have been almost 185 million COVID-19 cases reported globally. Weekly statistics tracked by the World Health Organization (WHO) have seen a rise in COVID-19 cases for two consecutive weeks as Delta variant cases have been detected in almost 100 countries and climbing. It is rapidly supplanting all

previous coronavirus strains except across South America, where the gamma variant (or P1, first detected in Brazil) continues to batter the continent with high case and death rates.

As Figure 1 demonstrates, week on week, the most significant burden of death, throughout most of the pandemic, has been carried by the high-income countries. Up to the beginning of April 2020, the US, Europe, and Brazil were considered the COVID-19 pandemic epicenters. Since the initiation of the COVID-19 vaccination campaign, new cases across Europe and the US have been trending rapidly down, consistent with the benefits afforded by the COVID-19 vaccine’s life-saving effects.

There has been a discernible shift in the pandemic, with middle- and low-income nations, where vaccination rates remain abysmally low, now becoming the main epicenters of the pandemic.

Over 3.2 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been administered worldwide, equating to 42 doses for every 100 people. Africa has only been able to provide 3.8 doses per 100 people so far. According to the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access initiative (COVAX), they have only delivered 95 million doses of vaccines to 134 participating countries.

Commencing in April and then through June, India faced a blistering high case and death rate, ushering in the pandemic’s shift from the wealthier to the poorer countries. In those three months, India reported 18.2 million COVID-19 cases and 235,000 COVID-19 deaths, a byproduct of the reckless and criminal policies implemented by Narendra Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party. For the entire pandemic, India has reported 34.6 million COVID-19 infections and over 400,000 deaths.

The continued high the death toll in the Americas, as

demonstrated by Figure 1, masks a shift away from the US and towards the countries of Latin America. Though these reported figures are underestimates, South America has thus far reported over 33 million COVID-19 cases and over 1 million deaths. Brazil has claimed the lion's share of these numbers with 18.8 million COVID-19 infections and over half a million deaths. However, Colombia, Argentina, Chile, and Peru also have faced recent catastrophic surges.

However, it is the shift of the pandemic to the African continent, home to 1.2 billion people, nearly all unvaccinated and previously unexposed to the virus, that has many international public health agencies extremely anxious. The WHO regional office for Africa has reported that cases have been rising by 25 percent every week for more than six weeks. Deaths due to COVID-19 are climbing exponentially.

Matshidiso Moeti, the regional director for the WHO, said, "The speed and scale of Africa's third wave is like nothing we have seen before. Cases are doubling every three weeks, compared to every four weeks at the start of the second wave. Almost 202,000 cases were reported in the past week, and the continent is on the verge of exceeding its worst week ever in this pandemic." She explained that there are more people falling ill who require hospitalization, including those younger than 45 years. Additionally, the Delta variant appears to be causing a more severe and a more extended period of illness. She made an urgent appeal for countries to share their excess vaccine doses to shore up the languishing vaccine gap amid the pandemic's worst wave.

Yet, despite the gains seen in the last few months across Europe and the US, case numbers have turned upward again, including now the death count in Europe (a lagging indicator). With tourism and the opening of economic activities well under way, these initiatives will further fuel the spread of the virus deep into every corner of the planet.

Instead of heeding the implications of these statistics and calling for public health measures to remain in place or be resumed, especially in the context of the highly transmissible Delta variant that is rapidly dominating all other strains, President Biden and his counterparts in Europe have in all essence declared the pandemic officially over.

Mark Honigsbaum, author of the recent volume on

mass disease outbreaks, *The Pandemic Century*, has remarked, "Few events are as compelling as an epidemic. When sufficiently severe, an epidemic evokes responses from every sector of society, laying bare social and economic fault lines and presenting politicians with fraught medical and moral choices. In the most extreme cases, an epidemic can foment a full-blown political crisis."

Unlike previous global scourges that afflicted human civilizations, the COVID-19 pandemic is unique because the world possesses the science and technology necessary to track and eradicate the virus. At the same time, resources can be provided to everyone to endure the essential inconveniences such as school closures, lockdowns, restrictions in movement, travel mitigation, and social distancing, necessary public health measures to bring the number of infections down to zero.

The ruling classes have openly and insidiously promoted a policy of mass infection at every turn in the pandemic, only pausing through limited or brief lockdowns when health care systems became so inundated that no other recourse would suffice. They ignored the science that demonstrated schools and children were critical vectors of the pandemic. And have used vaccine nationalism to substitute for necessary public health policies to protect lives.

The pandemic has claimed at least 4 million lives that should have never been lost, had the ruling elites of the major capitalist countries placed lives and livelihoods ahead of their profit interests and used their trillions in resources to end it. Their failure to do so demonstrates the utter bankruptcy of capitalism and the historical necessity for socialism.



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