

New data reveals life expectancy in England has fallen to its lowest level since 2011

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This week, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) reported that on September 7 the UK passed the grim total of more than 160,000 deaths due to COVID-19.

These deaths have been the main factor in a massive fall in life expectancy. Deaths in England were 1.4 times higher than expected between March 21, 2020, and July 2, 2021, according to data published by Public Health England (PHE). The increase is largely driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, find PHE, and has resulted in a staggering overall decrease in life expectancy of 1.3 years for males, to 78.7, and 0.9 years for females, to 82.7 years.

Life expectancy is now at its lowest in 10 years. Evidence indicates the growth in life expectancy began slowing in 2010-11. Analysts at the time strongly suggested a link between decreased life expectancy and the “age of austerity” beginning in 2008, including savage cuts to the National Health Service (NHS) and local government services.

Longitudinal data tracking life expectancy in England shows this most recent fall in life expectancy is the sharpest outside those experienced in wartime. The Kings Fund think tank recently stated: “There have been two turning points in trends in life expectancy in England in the past decade. From 2011 increases in life expectancy slowed after decades of steady improvement, prompting much debate about the causes. Then in 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic was a more significant turning point, causing a sharp fall in life expectancy the magnitude of which has not been seen since World War II.”

This health crisis, exacerbated by the pandemic, is a class issue. The explosive growth of social inequality over recent decades is the key factor in understanding the disproportionate and devastating impact of reduced life expectancy in working class communities.

The PHE report found that inequality in life expectancy between the richest and poorest residential areas of England is at its highest level since PHE began recording data on deprivation-linked life expectancy over 20 years ago. For men the gap was 10.3 years in 2020, a year longer than in 2019; for women it was 8.3 years—0.6 years more than in 2019.

“This demonstrates that the pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities in life expectancy by deprivation. Covid-19 was the cause of death that contributed most to the gap in 2020,” states the PHE report, noting that “higher mortality from heart disease, lung cancer, and chronic lower respiratory diseases in deprived areas remained important contributors.”

These pre-existing conditions, often the product of inequality, have themselves been made worse by the pandemic. Many of the most vulnerable sections of society have missed crucial hospital treatment due to COVID-19 overwhelming the NHS. PHE found evidence that people with worsening health conditions between May 2020 and January 2021, did not seek treatment. The most common reason given was to avoid putting pressure on the NHS, followed by fears of the pandemic.

Elsewhere, PHE reports an “unprecedented increase” in alcohol-related deaths, with alcohol-specific deaths increasing by 20 percent in 2020 compared to 2019. In the United States, the economists Case and Deaton have tracked over recent years the surge in what they term “deaths of despair”, i.e., deaths from alcoholism, drug addiction and suicides, among workers.

PHE conclude, “The report has highlighted how the direct impact of Covid-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected people from ethnic minority groups, people living in deprived areas, older people and those with pre-existing health conditions.”

PHE's research is only the latest to demonstrate the close links between social class, deprivation and COVID-19 mortality rates and to raise the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on working-class communities. This summer, *The Lancet* medical journal, reporting on the impact of cuts to local government funding on life expectancy in England, explained, "Funding reductions were greater in more deprived areas and these areas had the worst changes in life expectancy."

The Institute of Health Equity in their February 2020 report, "Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On", revealed that, since 2011, life expectancy in England has stalled for the first time since at least the turn of the last century. This stagnation and fall in life expectancy in the working class is a direct result of the hammer blows of austerity, with cuts in budgets from central government then faithfully imposed by mainly Labour Party-run local authorities.

A report released in July by University College London (UCL) reported how the coronavirus death rate in Greater Manchester was a quarter higher than anywhere else in England. Life expectancy dropped 1.6 years for men and 1.2 years for women in the region last year compared to 1.3 years and 0.9 years in England as a whole.

Professor Michael Marmot, an expert on health inequalities who led the research, described the figures as "jaw dropping". He found that the more impoverished a local authority, the higher its mortality rate was.

The COVID death rate in the North West of England was 307 per 100,000 for men and 195 for women—compared to England's overall rate of 233 per 100,000 for men and 142 for women. In some parts of Greater Manchester—a conurbation with a population of around 3 million—the rates were even higher at 350 per 100,000 for men in Salford and over 200 for women in Tameside.

The UCL report did not look at regions beyond the North West, but data released by the ONS in May show that the wealthiest parts of the country have recorded five times lower COVID death rates.

The loss of life detailed in the latest research is the result of monumental crimes carried out by the ruling elite, who have put the health of the economy before

public health and lives. The overall impact on human life has been enormous. In March, the Health Foundation found that a staggering 1.5 million years of life were lost in the UK in the first year of the pandemic. On average, each person killed by COVID-19 lost 10.2 years of life. In the poorest 20 percent of areas in England, there were 35 percent more deaths and 45 percent more years of life lost than in the richest 20 percent.

At that point, the Health Foundation charity calculated that 146,000 deaths had been lost due to COVID-19 in Britain. Many thousands more deaths have been tragically lost since then and the ruling elite's "let it rip" policy is taking the lives of hundreds more each week.



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