

# Tens of thousands of excess deaths recorded in 2022 in England and Wales

Margot Miller  
17 May 2023

Tens of thousands of excess deaths were recorded in the UK last year, 32,441 people in England and Wales between May and December 2022 according to the Organisation for National Statistics.

This figure excludes those with COVID listed on the death certificate. The excess deaths were calculated as those above a five-year average from 2016-19 and 2021, excluding 2020 when the number of deaths spiked due to COVID fatalities.

Overall, there have been over 220,000 lives lost to COVID in Britain as a result of the government's deliberate policy of mass infection. The toll was disproportionately heavy among older people, made worse by such murderous policies as the government's emptying hospital geriatric wards into care homes without proper testing or isolation procedures.

As Professor David Coleman, Emeritus Professor of Demography at Oxford University, told the *Mirror*, this deepens the mystery of persistent excess deaths. With a large number of elderly people killed by the virus, "the remaining population should be healthier, there should be a period afterwards where deaths are lower than usual but that hasn't happened."

Even when taking into consideration a growing elderly population between 2016 and 2022, there are still a significant number of excess deaths. The Age-Related Standardised Mortality Rate (ARSMR) for December 22 was 5.8 percent above the five-year average.

Full scientific explanations of these facts are still being worked out. National mortality and excess death statistics are the product of a large number of complex factors affecting a huge and varied population. The evidence suggests, however, that this is not a temporary phenomenon, but the result of a general worsening of the health of the population, such that the UK now has the largest number of people out of work due to ill health on record—more than 2.5 million, or one in 14 working-age

adults.

A major factor is doubtless the crisis in the health service, exposed and exacerbated by the pandemic. The National Health Service (NHS) has suffered deep funding cuts and privatisation, left with outdated buildings and equipment and record staff shortages. COVID-19 and the government's policy of mass infection intensified staffing problems, leading to the deaths of many health workers and pushing thousands to leave the health profession due to either burnout or ill-health associated with COVID.

Before the pandemic, there were 4.43 million patients on the NHS waiting list. The figure for March 2023 is 7.33 million. This means that over 11 percent of the entire UK population of 66 million is waiting for treatment. Of these, 3.3 million have waited over 18 weeks and 360,000 for over a year.

The number of people seen by a specialist consultant within two weeks of an urgent referral by a General Practitioner (GP) was 83.9 percent for March 2023—the government target of 93 percent has not been met since May 2020. For many, getting a GP appointment in the first place is a nightmare, with too many patients to each doctor. Sometimes GPs are unable to make referrals for hospital care because slots are unavailable, which means the care falls back on the GP, increasing pressure on overstretched primary care.

Delays can mean chronic conditions become acute, putting lives in danger and further pressure on the NHS. Only 54 percent of cancer patients received treatment within two months, according to statistics from this January, as GP referrals increased 12 percent versus January 2022. By June last year, the number of patients waiting more than the maximum 18 weeks for cardiac treatment had trebled since February 2020 to nearly 100,000. According to Diabetes UK, there has been a 13 percent increase in diabetes associated deaths compared to pre-pandemic figures.

In December-January last winter, potentially of excess deaths were attributed to worst-ever wait times for ambulances and in Accident and Emergency departments.

Right-wing commentators are doing their best to attribute this crisis to the lockdowns implemented in the first two years of the pandemic. This is totally bogus. The main blow dealt to the NHS was by the repeated rampant spread of COVID-19 promoted by the “let it rip” policy, overflowing hospitals with desperately ill people.

Lockdowns were reluctantly implemented by the government under duress, fearing social anger at the consequences of its policies. As far as they impeded access to healthcare and other services, this was due to their totally improvised, unplanned-for character, with no provision made for managing COVID upon reopening, let alone looking after the broader health of the population.

Writing in the *Guardian* against the “weaponization” of excess death statistics to attack lockdowns last September, Chair of Global Public Health at the University of Edinburgh Professor Devi Sridhar pointed to “a mix of the new burden of Covid-19 and an overloaded health service.” She noted, “Covid is making us sicker and more vulnerable to other diseases (research suggests it may contribute to delayed heart attacks, strokes, and dementia).”

This is the great unmentionable in most of the media because it refutes the ruling elite’s narrative that the pandemic is over, in order that nothing get in the way of profit-making and pursuing war against Russia.

Prompted by the Democratic Party administration in the US, which has permitted its COVID-19 public health emergency to expire, the World Health Organisation declared that COVID is no longer a public health emergency of international concern. This despite a further million dying from the virus globally the past three months, and the emergence of new variants. The Conservative government, with full backing from Labour and trade unions, lifted its remaining COVID restrictions in England in February 2022 under a “living with COVID” plan.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* noted in relation to the Biden government’s move, COVID -19 is to “remain permanently embedded in society, continuing to infect, disable and kill masses of people for the foreseeable future.”

It is likely that most of the world’s population have been infected at least once, and there is a mountain of growing evidence as to the long-term sequelae of

infection. According to ~~the Lancet~~ *the Lancet*, “Almost 90 percent of COVID-19 survivors have developed sequelae, including not only general symptoms such as fatigue but also severe neurological, cardiac, renal or respiratory manifestations.”

The COVID-19 pandemic is the most advanced expression of a broader reversal of public health standards driven by the pursuit of profit over human needs. According to the Public Health Foundation, the grant dedicated to preventive medicine has been cut by 26 percent in real terms per person since 2015/16.

Worsening social inequality and poverty are also major contributors to poor health in the population, including obesity and mental health problems. Coleman noted that “some people have been forecasting separately from Covid that death rates would continue to get worse because the country is so unhealthy.”

Sridhar listed as other probable causes of the UK’s excess deaths “an extremely hot summer,” linked to climate change, and “the cost of living crisis and concerns about fuel poverty.” Both of which point to capitalism’s complete failure to secure a healthy environment for the population.

The health and lives of this and future generations cannot be left in the hands of a profit-crazed ruling class or their lackeys in the trade union bureaucracy whose betrayal of workers’ struggles—above all in the health service—have allowed such a staggering reversal in the living standards of the working class.

NHS FightBack is leading the struggle against the health union bureaucracies’ sabotage of the NHS strike wave, on behalf of health workers and the entire working class which relies on their services.

The Socialist Equality Parties have organised a Global Workers’ Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic to raise the level of scientific awareness and as a critical component of the fight to rebuild a socialist culture in the working class. The events of the last three years have confirmed that this is the only basis for the defence and improvement of public health.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**