



Department  
of Health &  
Social Care



## Monitoring the wider health impacts of COVID-19

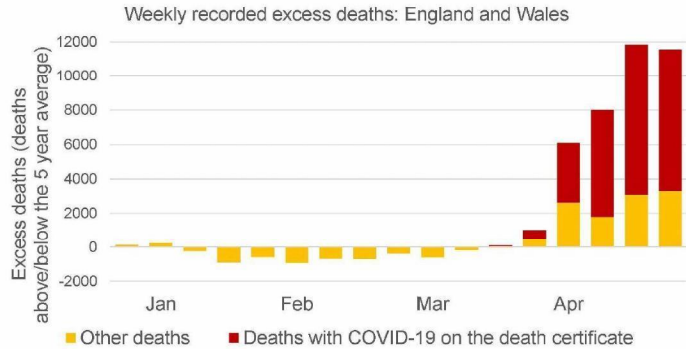
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**UK Department of Health and Social Care**

Presentation to OECD Health Committee, 6 May 2020

**The UK is focused on minimising excess deaths and balancing four categories of health impacts**

- A:** Deaths directly due to COVID-19
- B:** Potential additional “indirect” COVID-19 deaths in the event of critical care capacity becoming overwhelmed
- C:** Medium-term impacts due to changes to healthcare activity, such as cancellation or postponement of elective surgery
- D:** The implications of “lockdown” - both short-term impacts on mental and physical health, and long-term impacts due to economic deprivation



The UK Government is looking at **total excess deaths**, not solely those recorded as covid-related, and has been explicit with the public about the health trade-offs it is seeking to manage.

Source: Office for National Statistics

### Category C: medium-term impacts due to changes to healthcare activity

The National Health Service (NHS) has prioritised treatments to ensure capacity to deal with COVID-19, other emergency activity and critical elective and cancer care. This has meant de-prioritising non-urgent care and postponing routine elective operations, with a strong focus on risk management.

This has helped to minimise short-term deaths by ensuring the NHS has not been overwhelmed.

But we are mindful of medium-term health issues due to delayed activity and are carefully monitoring a range of operational metrics, including:

- Emergency attendances
- Emergency admissions
- Non-emergency operations and waiting lists
- Cancer referrals and starts
- Ambulance response times

As COVID-19 hospitalisations are falling, the NHS is resuming postponed activities.

### Category D: short-term impacts of lockdown on mental and physical health

#### Air pollution & road traffic accidents

- Reduced road traffic levels, due to school closures, home working and social distancing, is reducing pollution (and the number of people in polluted areas. PHE attributes 28,000-36,000 UK deaths per year, as well as other health impacts, to air pollution). Road traffic accidents are also being monitored.
- During lockdown, levels of nitrogen dioxide are down by over 40% in many UK cities, compared with the five-year average for the time of year (Univ of York).

#### Mental health

- The British population is more anxious than in September 2019 but less anxious than a month ago. On a scale of 0-10 (0=not at all anxious yesterday; 10=completely anxious yesterday) the mean for all adults was 2.9 in September 2019, 5.3 from 20-22 March 2020 and 4.2 from 17-19 April. (ONS)
- 10% of 18-29 year olds reported some self-harming in the UCL COVID-19 Social Study, which suggested self-harm may be increasing amongst this group .
- School closures may be having an impact on mental health. 50% of respondents who were home schooling their children said it is negatively affecting the well-being of their children, and 30% saying it is negatively affecting their own well-being (ONS Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, 3-13 April).

#### Domestic Abuse

- Average weekly calls to the National Domestic Abuse Helpline have increased by over 50%. (Refuge)
- The Counting Dead Women project reported 16 suspected domestic abuse killings since lockdown (23 March to 12 April) – more than double the average.

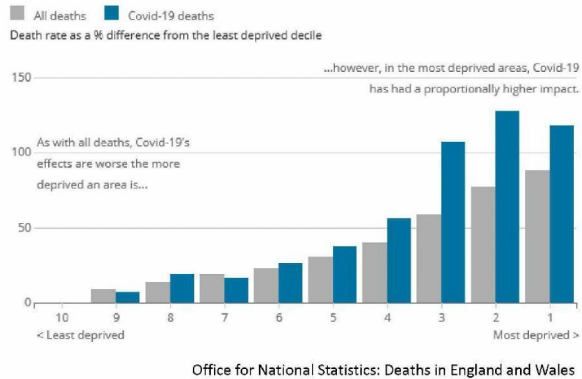
#### Exercise

- 45% of adults are finding it harder to stay fit and healthy compared to before the outbreak (10% are finding it easier) (IPSOS MORI survey 10-13 April)
- 25% of adults have tried a new form of exercise, or are exercising more. (IPSOS MORI survey 10-13 April).
- 36% of individuals report doing less exercise than before the outbreak began, while 27% say they are exercising more. (YouGov poll from 7-9 April)

**Category D: long-term impacts due to increased deprivation**

We are monitoring a variety of economic indicators – mindful of the long-term link between any *sustained* economic downturn, deprivation and health.

Even in the short-term, COVID-19 is hitting deprived communities hardest:



**Studies on the impact of deprivation on health**

**Chronic health conditions (Janke et al, 2020)**

- Evidence suggests that a 1% fall in employment is associated with a 1.7% increase in the prevalence of chronic health conditions. The biggest impacts are on mental health, followed by musculoskeletal, cardiovascular and respiratory conditions, taking at least two years to feed through.

**Economic downturn and life expectancy (Autor et al, 2016, 2019; Pierce and Shott, 2020)**

- Structural change and deep economic downturns shown to have very strong impacts through deprivation which can be very long lasting – e.g. the ‘China shock’ on US manufacturing employment had knock on effects on mortality.
- Additionally, deprivation can lead to ‘deaths of despair’ which have been linked to recent falls in life expectancy in the US (Case and Deaton, 2020).

**Mental health (Ruhm, 2015)**

- A strong link has been established between recessions and mental health. For example, a 1 percentage point growth in unemployment is associated with a 1.7% rise in suicides. Depression and poor mental health are also risk factors for future physical health and mortality.

**The UK Office for National Statistics has rapidly put in place new data collections, analyses and surveys to monitor wider health impacts**

**More rapid reporting of deaths and other data**

- Daily reporting and enhanced weekly reporting of all deaths registrations
- Care Quality Commission reporting on deaths in care homes
- Analysis by protected characteristics and deprivation levels

**Opinions and Lifestyle Survey**

This survey looks to understand the impact of COVID-19 on people, households and communities in Great Britain. This 10-day collection period is the first to be based wholly after the government Stay At Home measures were introduced.

**Survey on the economic impacts on the UK**

**Social impacts on vulnerable groups**

**Social impacts on disabled people**

**Swabbing survey**

**Personal and economic wellbeing estimates**

**Coronavirus (COVID-19) roundup**  
Catch up on the latest data and analysis related to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and its impact on our economy and society.

**Office for National Statistics**

**Deaths involving COVID-19 by local area and socioeconomic deprivation: deaths occurring between 1 March and 17 April 2020**

**Figure 1: Average anxiety ratings were at 5.18 (out of 10) over the period 20 to 30 March 2020**  
Average anxiety ratings, UK and Great Britain, Quarter 2 (Apr to Jun) 2011 to 13 April 2020

— Quarterly — Monthly — Weekly  
Wider average

ONS monthly data from 1st January 2020

**If we ask you to take part in an ONS survey or study, it's never been more important to help.**  
Thanks from everyone at the Office for National Statistics.

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