

Analysis shows 54,000 “excess deaths” in US, pointing to coronavirus death toll of 200,700

By Kate Randall
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More than 165,000 Americans have now died from the coronavirus, according to Johns Hopkins University data. The US passed the grim statistic of 5 million cases of COVID-19 earlier this month. As horrifying as these figures are, a new analysis shows that the number of deaths from the coronavirus likely has been significantly undercounted.

Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) analyzed by the *New York Times* have revealed that 200,700 people died from March 15, when the pandemic took hold, to July 25. This is 54,000 higher than the confirmed death toll, averaged, for the same time period in the previous three years. Excess deaths in the analysis are rounded to the nearest hundred.

These 54,000 “excess deaths” are defined by the CDC as “the difference between the observed numbers of deaths in specific time periods and expected numbers of deaths in the same time periods.” The analysis strongly indicates that these excess deaths have been caused by the virus itself or by conditions triggered by the upheaval resulting from the pandemic.

The *Times* looked at CDC figures for deaths from all causes, adjusting current death records to account for typical reporting lags. This allows for comparisons that don't rely on the availability of COVID-19 tests in a given place or on the accuracy of cause-of-death reporting. Epidemiologists generally agree that assessing excess deaths is the best way to assess the impact of the pandemic.

Higher than normal death rates are widespread for the vast majority of US states. Only Alaska, Hawaii, Maine and West Virginia have death counts that look similar to recent years. Through July 25, the *Times* analysis shows that there were about 37 percent more excess deaths in the US than the official coronavirus fatality

count.

New York City, the early epicenter of the outbreak, has suffered the most dramatic increase in deaths. During the peak of the outbreak in the city, deaths surged to seven times the usual number. Overall, New York City had 27,200 excess deaths during the period analyzed.

In addition to New York City, four states recorded deaths at least 10 percent higher than the normal level. New Jersey saw 18,000 deaths from May to July. New York State, excluding New York City, recorded 14,200 excess deaths. Texas had 13,500 excess deaths; California had 13,400.

While the states with the highest rates of excess deaths were in the Northeast and the West, other states in the West as well as states in the South began to show higher numbers in July, adding to their overall count. These include Florida, with 9,700 excess deaths during the study period; Arizona, with 6,100; and South Carolina, with 3,200.

The *Times* analysis shows that the pandemic's toll cannot be attributed simply to the virus killing vulnerable people who would have died anyway. Most of the excess deaths revealed by the analysis could be attributed to the virus itself, but it is also likely that deaths from other causes have also risen due to hospitals being overwhelmed by COVID patients. People suffering from conditions that should be survivable have not sought care out of fear of contracting the virus. Such conditions include heart attack and stroke.

In addition, people who have died at home have had their cause of death listed as pneumonia or other conditions that were likely caused by COVID-19.

The lack of a coordinated nationwide testing system, which would identify coronavirus cases, has

contributed to an undercounting of deaths from the virus. While the death toll rises, coronavirus testing is dropping significantly. According to the COVID Tracking Project, the average number of daily tests conducted in the US fell from 809,200 in the week ending July 26 to 712,112 last week.

As the WSWS has reported, there is no systematic testing for workers. There is also a lag in testing results that renders testing virtually useless for contact tracing.

The ruling elite has little interest in identifying COVID cases. Rather, it is laser focused on forcing workers back on the job and sending children back to school. The decline in testing is part of the ruling class' policy of "malign neglect."

The *Times* analysis of CDC data shows that the devastation caused by the coronavirus pandemic is even more devastating than the official figures indicate.

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