

## BBC: Have UK Experts Over-Egged Coronavirus Deaths?

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- BBC News

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Have UK experts over-egged coronavirus deaths?  
Scary figures have been put forward for the expected death toll –  
but are they quite what they seem?  
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# Coronavirus ‘will kill 250,000 in the UK unless Britain is put in lockdown’

# **The dossier that horrified British experts: It predicted up to 250,000 Britons could be killed and said coronavirus is the most serious respiratory virus since Spanish flu - read the warnings that made Boris Johnson change his strategy almost overnight**

- Recent scientific report on coronavirus forced government to U-turn its advice
- Researchers from Imperial College London crunched chilling data about virus
- Findings will constrain liberties of everyone in Britain for much of next 18 months

The drastic measures taken in the UK to tackle coronavirus have been justified because of the need to save lives.

Modelling by Imperial College London – used to inform government – suggests 500,000 could die if we do nothing.

Even the government's previous strategy to slow the spread was likely to lead to 250,000 deaths, the research showed.

The warnings prompted ministers to announce on Monday the most draconian crackdown on freedom in peacetime with the public told not to go to pubs, clubs or theatres, and to work from home if possible.

The move has hit the economy, putting jobs at risk and prompting schools to be closed and exams cancelled.

## **No other option – experts**

Professor Neil Ferguson, one of the lead academics involved in the modelling, told the BBC's Today Programme this week there was "no option" if 250,000 lives were not to be risked.

Sir Patrick Vallance, the government's chief scientific adviser, said in an appearance before the Health Select Committee, that the hope was to keep the death toll below 20,000 by suppressing the virus.

That would still be worse than those killed by flu, he said, giving a number of 8,000 per year.

He said limiting deaths to 20,000 would be "horrible" but still represented a "good outcome" given where we are.

## Estimated UK death toll in different scenarios

If nothing is done:



Slow spread of virus, including isolating vulnerable and those with symptoms:



Suppress virus, including school closures, reducing social contact, isolating vulnerable and those with symptoms:



Source: SAGE / Imperial College London

BBC

### Would these people be dying anyway?

The figures for coronavirus are eye-watering. But what is not clear – because the modellers did not map this – is to what extent the deaths would have happened without coronavirus.

Given that the old and frail are the most vulnerable, would these people be dying anyway?

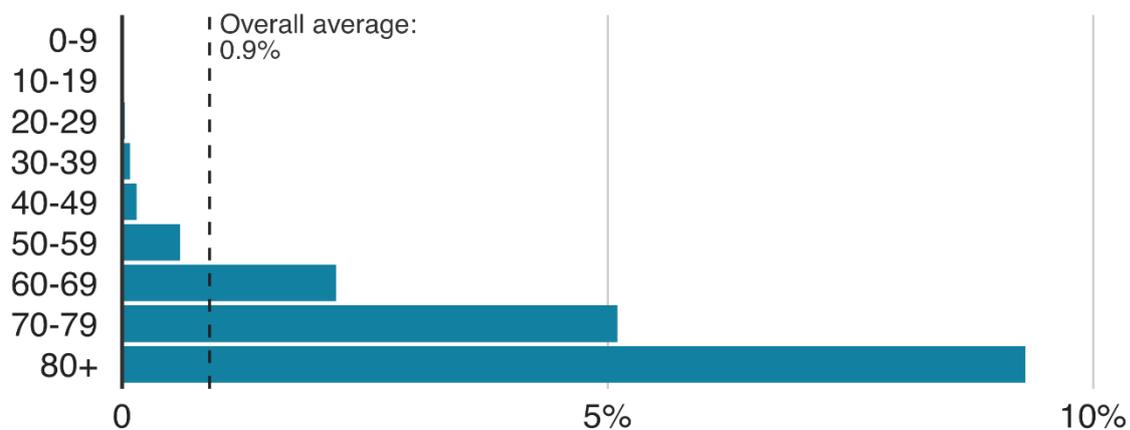
Every year more than 500,000 people die in England and Wales: factor in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and the figure tops 600,000.

The coronavirus deaths will not be on top of this. Many would be within this “normal” number of expected deaths. In short, they would have died anyway.

It was a point conceded by Sir Patrick at a press conference on Thursday when he said there would be “some overlap” between coronavirus deaths and expected deaths – he just did not know how much of an overlap.

# Death rates depend on age group

Estimated proportion of deaths among infections



Source: Imperial College London, 16 March

BBC

## The flu comparison

In contrast, the figure he gave for flu deaths to MPs – 8,000 – is different. It is actually the number of deaths over and above what you would expect to happen in any given year.

Many more die with flu, but the figure gives you an indication of how many more die because of flu, whereas the 20,000, 250,000 and 500,000 figures for coronavirus are simply the number of deaths linked to coronavirus.

The testing which has been done in many countries means we know when a patient dies with the virus inside their body. What it does not tell us is to what extent coronavirus contributed to the death.

## Why better intelligence is needed



There are, of course, other factors at play here. Left unchecked, the deaths would come very quickly.

The 500,000 deaths could all occur in the UK by August, the modellers said.

This in itself would overwhelm the health service – if they were right – putting even more lives at risk, because care would not be available for others.

But there is certainly evidence to suggest the modellers have underestimated the ability of the NHS to increase intensive care capacity.

NHS England chief executive Simon Stevens suggested intensive care capacity could be doubled, after this modelling came out.

What else has not been done is a proper assessment of the economic and social costs of the measures taken, which themselves will put lives and health at risk.