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Covid-19: People in most deprived areas of England and Wales twice as likely to die

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People who live in the most deprived areas of England and Wales are around twice as likely to die after contracting covid-19, according to new data¹ from the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

The unequal impact of the coronavirus on society was revealed in new data released by the ONS on 12 June looking at deaths involving covid-19 by local area and socioeconomic deprivation between 1 March and 31 May.

The figures showed that the rate of deaths involving covid-19 in the most deprived areas was 128.3 deaths per 100 000 population, which was more than double the death rate in the least deprived areas where it was 58.8 deaths per 100 000.

For Wales, the most deprived areas recorded deaths involving covid-19 of 109.5 per 100 000 population—almost twice as high as in the least deprived areas, which had 57.5 deaths per 100 000.

Overall, there were 46 687 deaths in England and Wales between 1 March and 31 May and registered by 6 June that involved covid-19, said the statistics authority, which represented a quarter (25.9%) of all deaths occurring over this three month period—180 586 deaths.

Geographically, London experienced the highest covid-19 mortality rates across the country in March and April, but this has now fallen.

Between March and May, London had the highest death rate with 137.6 deaths involving covid-19 per 100 000 persons, which was higher than any other region in England and more than a third higher than the region with the next highest rate.

The heavy impact of the virus in the English capital was also revealed by the fact that nine of the 10 local authorities with the highest rates for deaths involving covid-19 over this period were London boroughs.

Brent had the highest overall rate with 210.9 deaths per 100 000 population, followed by Newham (196.8 deaths per 100 000 population), and Hackney (182.9 deaths per 100 000 population).

Sarah Caul, head of mortality analysis at the ONS, said, "People living in more deprived areas have continued to experience covid-19 mortality rates more than double those living in less deprived areas. General mortality rates are normally higher in more deprived areas, but covid-19 appears to be increasing this effect.

"Although London had some of the highest covid-19 mortality rates in the country during March and April, it is now experiencing lower mortality rates compared with most areas."

During May, the region with the highest covid-19 mortality rate was the North East, where the rate was double that of London, she added, while the South West region continued to have the lowest mortality rate overall and during each of the last three months.

Health think tank the Health Foundation's chief executive Jennifer Dixon said, "Covid-19 is not a great leveller—the pandemic is having an unequal impact on our already unequal society.

"Today's data show that people living in the most deprived areas of England are more than twice as likely to die as a result of covid-19 than those in the least deprived.

"In February 2020, the *Marmot Ten Years On* report² identified wide and growing levels of health inequality across England, particularly between north and south. Living in socioeconomically deprived areas is associated with poor health and a shorter life and the direct effect of covid-19 is making these inequalities worse.

"A cross government strategy to improve health and reduce avoidable inequality is long overdue."

1 Office for National Statistics. Deaths involving covid-19 by local area and socioeconomic deprivation: deaths occurring between 1 March and 31 May 2020. 12 June 2020. www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsoccurringbetween1marchand31may2020.

2 Iacubucci G. Marmot 10 years on: austerity has damaged nation's health, say experts. *BMJ* 2020;368:m747. doi: 10.1136/bmj.m747 pmid: 32098785