



England & Wales mortality monitor – COVID-19 update – week 19 of 2020

Background

During the coronavirus pandemic we are publishing weekly updates to the CMI Mortality Monitor. This update shows the position as at 8 May 2020 (week 19 of 2020), based on provisional deaths data published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on 19 May 2020. All updates are publicly available from the CMI pages of the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries website: <https://www.actuaries.org.uk/learn-and-develop/continuous-mortality-investigation/other-cmi-outputs/mortality-monitor>.

Summary

There could have been 57,000 to 64,000 excess registered deaths in the UK by 18 May 2020.

There were 38% more deaths registered in England & Wales in week 19 of 2020 than if standardised mortality rates had been the same as week 19 of 2019. The difference was 58% in week 18 and 116% in week 17. We note that the timing of public holidays in week 19 (on Friday in 2020, but on Monday in 2019) will have reduced the estimate of excess deaths in week 19. The ONS notes that “the number of registrations decreased from 2,950 deaths on Friday 1 May 2020 to 88 deaths on Friday 8 May 2020”.

The cumulative mortality improvement in England & Wales for 2020 is –9.4% as at 8 May 2020, compared to +0.1% as at 20 March 2020, before the coronavirus pandemic had a material impact. More recent data issued by Public Health England (PHE) and the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) for later periods suggests that the cumulative improvement will fall further over the coming weeks.

Notes

Full details of the methods used for results based on the ONS data are included in [Working Paper 111](#). Our analysis is based on Standardised Mortality Rates (SMRs). These adjust the provisional weekly deaths data published by the ONS to allow for changes in the age and gender distribution of the population over time.

We have included versions of Charts D and E from the standard quarterly monitor, which show results for males and females combined, for ages 20-100:

- Chart 1 (like Chart D from the quarterly report) shows cumulative standardised mortality for each year, relative to the average for 2010-2019.
- Chart 2 (like Chart E from the quarterly report) shows cumulative standardised mortality improvements for each year (i.e. the progression of annual mortality improvements over the course of each year).
- Mortality rates and mortality improvements vary by age, and the results shown are sensitive to the age distribution of the chosen standard population (the 2013 European Standard Population).

Our calculations rely on data for registered deaths, and we are conscious that in recent weeks deaths may have been registered earlier or later than in previous years. Consequently, comparisons of mortality between 2020 and earlier years may not be on a like-for-like basis. Also, results for individual weeks may not be consistent between years due to the timing of public holidays.

Use of this document

Please note that the CMI disclaims any liability from use of or reliance on these calculations, including in relation to financial transactions such as longevity swaps; and the CMI does not guarantee that it will continue to publish updates.

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TAS compliance

This paper is intended to analyse recent mortality in England & Wales. It complies with the principles in the Financial Reporting Council’s Technical Actuarial Standard “TAS 100: Principles for Technical Actuarial Work”. Any person using this paper should exercise judgement over its suitability and relevance for their purpose.



Results

Chart 1 shows cumulative standardised mortality rates compared to the 2010-2019 average. Cumulative mortality to week 19 of 2020 is higher than cumulative mortality to week 19 in any year since 2005, and is 6.2% above the 2010-19 average. It was 1.9% below the 2010-19 average at week 12, before the coronavirus pandemic had a material impact.

Chart 1: Cumulative standardised mortality rate compared to the 2010-2019 average

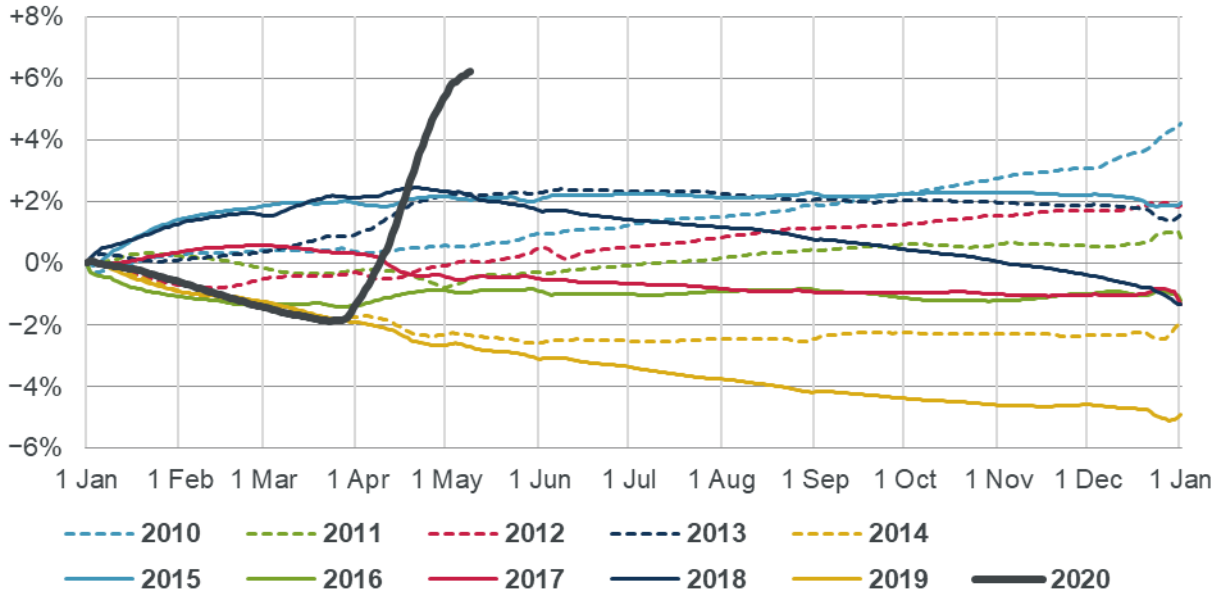
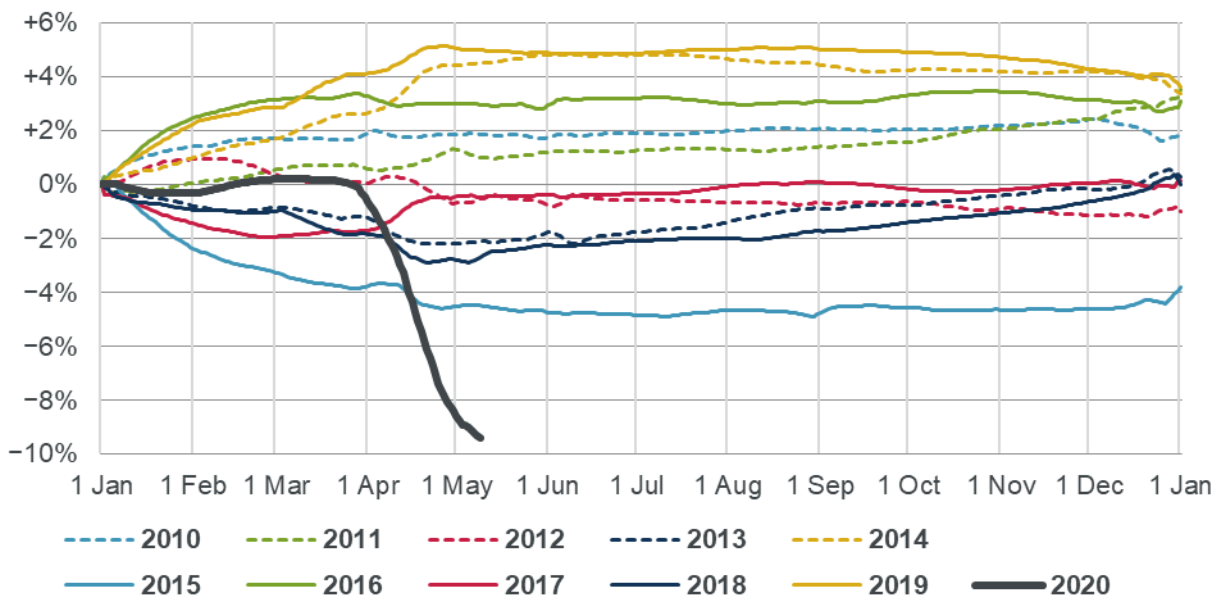


Chart 2 shows the cumulative annual standardised mortality improvement for 2020 and for the previous ten years. Note that Chart 2 shows cumulative improvements, so a higher value represents a higher improvement and lower mortality; whereas in Chart 1 a higher value represents higher mortality.

The cumulative mortality improvement is -9.4% as at 8 May 2020 (week 19 of 2020), compared to +0.1% as at week 12, before the coronavirus pandemic had a material impact, and -8.8% as at week 18.

Chart 2: Cumulative annual standardised mortality improvement





Impact of coronavirus on total deaths

The ONS data shows 3,930 deaths registered in week 19 “where COVID-19 was mentioned on the death certificate”. The overall impact of the coronavirus pandemic on total deaths may be different:

- There may have been some deaths that were wholly or partially due to COVID-19 but where COVID-19 was not mentioned on the death certificate.
- Some deaths from other causes may have been indirectly linked to COVID-19; for example, if pressure on medical resources caused deaths that would not have occurred in the absence of the coronavirus.
- Some deaths where COVID-19 was mentioned on the death certificate may not be “excess” deaths, as the deceased might have died from another cause in the same period, in the absence of the coronavirus.
- There may have been indirect impacts on deaths due to restrictions on movement due to the coronavirus; for example, changes in traffic, pollution and mental health.

To consider the possible impact of the pandemic on total deaths, we have estimated the number of deaths that we would have seen in week 19 of 2020 if the SMRs for each gender and age-group had been the same in week 19 of 2020 as in week 19 of 2019. As mortality in the first 12 weeks of 2019 and 2020 was similar, as seen in Charts 1 and 2, this gives a broad indication of “expected” mortality in the absence of the coronavirus pandemic¹. We can then subtract the expected deaths from actual deaths to estimate the “excess” deaths that, in the absence of other likely causes, may be attributable to the pandemic.

We have not made any adjustment for differences in the timing of public holidays in 2019 and 2020. While such differences may affect expected, actual and excess results for individual weeks, positive and negative impacts for different weeks should cancel out over time in cumulative results.

- The timing of Easter is likely to have likely to have reduced the estimated excess in week 15 and increased it in week 16.
- The timing of the early May bank holiday, on Monday of week 19 in 2019, but on Friday of week 19 in 2020, will have reduced the estimated excess in week 19. The ONS say that² “the number of registrations decreased from 2,950 deaths on Friday 1 May 2020 to 88 deaths on Friday 8 May 2020”. It is likely that we will see some registrations in week 20 that would otherwise have been reported in week 19.

Table 1 shows that:

- Actual deaths in week 19 are 38% higher than expected: 36% higher than expected for males and 39% higher for females, compared to 55% for males, 61% for females, and 58% overall in week 18.
- The 3,475 “excess” deaths in week 19 are 12% lower than the 3,930 registered deaths reported by the ONS where COVID-19 was mentioned on the death certificate. In earlier weeks, excess deaths were higher than mentions of COVID-19 (9% higher in week 18 and 43% higher in week 17). As noted earlier, the week 19 excess will have been affected by the public holiday on Friday of week 19 in 2020.

¹ Our calculation of excess deaths depends on the historical period that we use to estimate expected deaths. If we had used the average standardised mortality rates for 2015-19 rather than only 2019 to calculate expected deaths, without allowing for mortality improvements, then this would have increased the excess deaths by 875 in week 19, and reduced the cumulative excess at week 19 (shown in Chart 4) from 50,372 to 46,033, a difference of 9%. We reiterate our preference for using 2019 to estimate expected deaths in the absence of a pandemic, as 2019 and 2020 had similar mortality experience for weeks 1 to 12.

²

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsregistredweeklyinenglandandwalesprovisional/weekending8may2020>



Table 1: Comparison of COVID-19 deaths and “excess” deaths

Description	Deaths in week 19 of 2020		
	Male	Female	Total
“Expected” registered deaths, if SMRs were the same in 2019 and 2020	4,553	4,629	9,182
Actual registered deaths, from all causes	6,209	6,448	12,657
“Excess” registered deaths (expected minus actual)	1,656	1,819	3,475
Registered deaths where COVID-19 was mentioned on the death certificate	1,992	1,938	3,930
Excess as a proportion of expected	36%	39%	38%
Excess as a proportion of where COVID-19 was on the death certificate	83%	94%	88%

Chart 3 compares “excess” registered deaths and registered deaths where COVID-19 was mentioned on the death certificate in each week since week 13. While there were some deaths in weeks 11 and 12 where COVID-19 was mentioned on the death certificate, the level of excess deaths in those weeks is small compared to typical weekly volatility in deaths, so cannot be reliably estimated. Chart 4 is similar, but plots the cumulative numbers of deaths, since week 13.

Chart 3: Comparison of deaths registered in each week (see text for details)

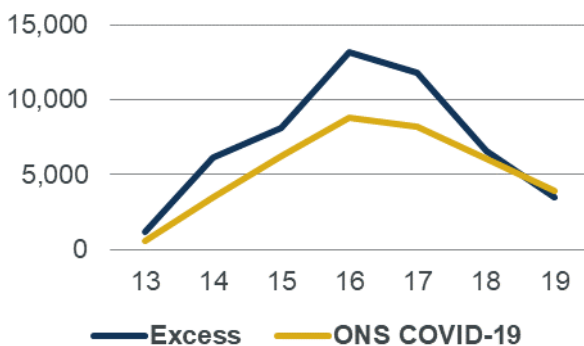


Chart 4: Comparison of cumulative registered deaths (see text for details)

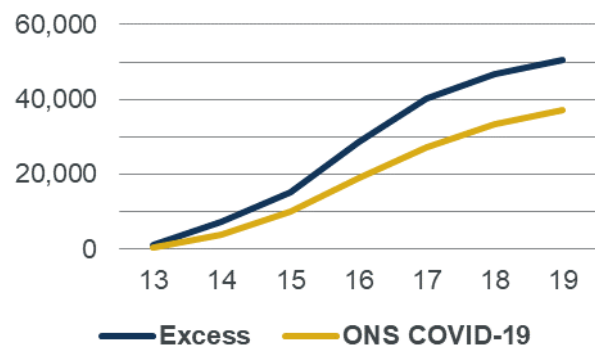


Table 2 is similar to Table 1 but shows variations by age band. The ratios of excess to expected deaths tend to increase with age, and are higher for males than females apart from the 85+ age band. (We do not show results for ages below 45 as the relatively low numbers of deaths at those ages means that estimates of expected deaths would be unreliable.) Table 2: Comparison of actual, expected and excess registered deaths by age-band in week 19 of 2020

	Male				Female			
	45-64	65-74	75-84	85+	45-64	65-74	75-84	85+
“Expected”	633	877	1,399	1,443	477	654	1,242	2,123
Actual	847	1,129	1,979	2,078	523	806	1,648	3,366
“Excess”	214	252	580	635	46	152	406	1,243
Excess divided by expected	34%	29%	42%	44%	10%	23%	33%	59%



Charts 5 and 6 show the weekly progression of the “excess divided by expected” ratios from Table 2, for males and females respectively. This ratio has tended to be higher for older age bands throughout the pandemic.

Chart 5: Excess as a proportion of expected in each week – males (see text for details)

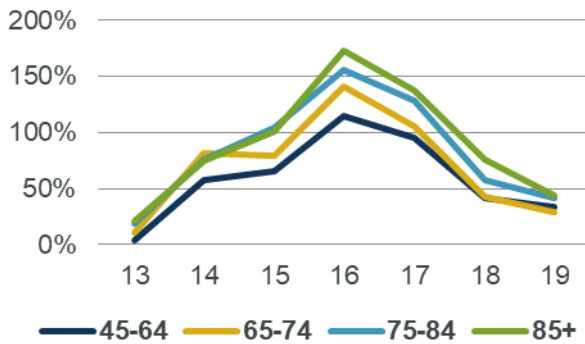
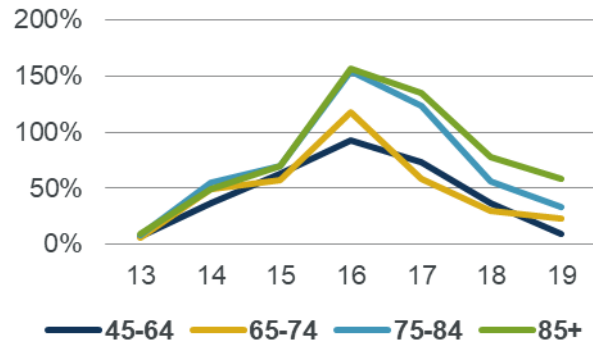


Chart 6: Excess as a proportion of expected in each week – females (see text for details)



Deaths not reported yet

We intend to publish weekly updates to the mortality monitor during the coronavirus pandemic. The results in this update use ONS data on registered deaths to 8 May 2020, but Public Health England (PHE), for England, and the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), for the devolved administrations of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, publish daily information on deaths of people who have had a positive test result for the coronavirus confirmed by a Public Health or NHS laboratory. We refer to this data as just “PHE data” in this report for brevity.

Note that PHE has changed the way that it reports COVID-19 data. The PHE data used in this section of the week 14 to week 16 updates of the mortality monitor was only for deaths of those hospitalised who tested positive for the coronavirus. Updates from week 17 onwards allow for the revised PHE figures, and are not limited to hospitalised cases.

The PHE figures are not directly comparable to the ONS figures, and could be higher or lower for any given week. That is because, although the PHE definition for COVID-19 deaths is narrower than the ONS definition (as it is limited to those who have tested positive for the coronavirus), PHE may report on deaths before they have been registered.

Table 3 compares the PHE figures reported during weeks 14 to 19 to our estimates of excess mortality, from all causes, in those weeks. It shows that the relationship between the PHE and CMI figures varies significantly between weeks. This may be due to the timing of public holidays affecting the CMI figures based on registered deaths more than the PHE figure for reported deaths.

The table also shows the PHE figures for earlier and later periods; our assumptions for the relationship between the PHE and CMI excess figures in those periods; and our resulting estimates of excess registered deaths, in the final column. The ranges of estimated excess registered deaths reflect variations in the ratio between the PHE and CMI excess figures in weeks 14 to 19. It is possible that excess deaths could be outside the range shown if that ratio moves outside its historical range.

The PHE figures are those issued on 18 May 2020, for deaths in England & Wales reported by 5pm on 17 May 2020.



Table 3: Comparison of PHE's reported COVID-19 deaths with CMI's estimate of excess deaths

Period	PHE reported ³	CMI excess	Actual CMI ÷ PHE	Assumed CMI ÷ PHE	Estimated Excess
Later (9 - 18 May 2020)	3,160	n/a	n/a	1.03-2.31	3,259 - 7,302
Week 19 (2 - 8 May 2020)	3,369	3,475	1.03	n/a	3,475
Week 18 (25 April - 1 May 2020)	4,279	6,587	1.54	n/a	6,587
Week 17 (18 - 24 April 2020)	5,467	11,794	2.16	n/a	11,794
Week 16 (11 - 17 April 2020)	5,711	13,197	2.31	n/a	13,197
Week 15 (4 - 10 April 2020)	5,932	8,076	1.36	n/a	8,076
Week 14 (28 March - 3 April 2020)	3,173	6,112	1.93	n/a	6,112
Earlier (to 27 March 2020)	1,126	n/a	n/a	1.03-2.31	1,161 - 2,602
TOTAL	32,217	n/a	n/a	n/a	53,661 - 59,145

Our analysis suggests that:

- there could have been in the range of 53,000 to 60,000 cumulative excess registered deaths in England & Wales by 18 May 2020; and
- applying the same method to the PHE figure for UK deaths suggests 57,000 to 64,000 excess registered deaths in the UK.

We note that these estimates are only slightly higher than in the week 18 monitor, due to the impact on death registrations of the timing of the bank holiday in week 19.

These calculations are sensitive to the assumed relationship between the PHE and CMI figures, particularly for the "later" period in Table 3. The calculations do not allow for deaths that may have occurred by 18 May 2020 but were not reported by then.

Data sources

The ONS provisional weekly deaths are available from:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/datasets/weeklyprovisionalfiguresondeathsregisteredinenglandandwales>

The PHE figures are available from:

<https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/>

³ These figures reflect the revision made by PHE to include deaths outside of a hospital setting.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/882565/Technical_Summary_PHE_Data_Series_COVID-19_Deaths_20200429.pdf



Reliances and limitations

The purpose of the weekly mortality monitor is to provide regular updates on standardised mortality in England & Wales during the coronavirus pandemic, adjusting ONS data to allow for changes in the size and age of the population.

The CMI aims to produce high-quality outputs and takes considerable care to ensure that the mortality monitor and the accompanying spreadsheet of results are accurate. However:

- We cannot guarantee their accuracy (see the Disclaimer).
- There is a reliance on the data published by the ONS and described as provisional.
- We have also applied judgement and assumptions in deciding on the calculation methods and the presentation of results.
- Anyone using the results of the mortality monitor should ensure that it is appropriate for their particular use, and note that care is needed when estimating full year experience from partial year experience. This is particularly true during the coronavirus pandemic.

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