

Covid-19 pandemic cut life expectancy by most since World War II

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Photo: Reuters

The impact of Covid-19 on lifespans may be greater in less developed countries that weren't included in the research

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The Covid-19 pandemic reduced [life expectancy](#) in 2020 by the largest amount since World War II, according to a study published on Monday by Oxford University, with the [life expectancy](#) of American men dropping by more than two years.

[Life expectancy](#) fell by more than six months compared with 2019 in 22 of the 29 countries analysed in the study, which spanned Europe, the United States and Chile. There were reductions in life expectancy in 27 of the 29 countries overall.

The university said most life expectancy reductions across different countries could be linked to official Covid-19 deaths. There have been nearly 5 million reported deaths caused by the new coronavirus so far, a Reuters tally shows.

“The fact that our results highlight such a large impact that is directly attributable to Covid-19 shows how devastating a shock it has been for many countries,” said Ridhi Kashyap, co-lead author of the paper, published in the International Journal of Epidemiology.

There were greater drops in life expectancy for men than women in most countries, with the largest decline in American men, whose life expectancy drop by 2.2 years relative to 2019.

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Overall, men had more than a year shaved off in 15 countries, compared to women in 11 countries. That wiped out the progress on mortality that had been made in the previous 5.6 years.

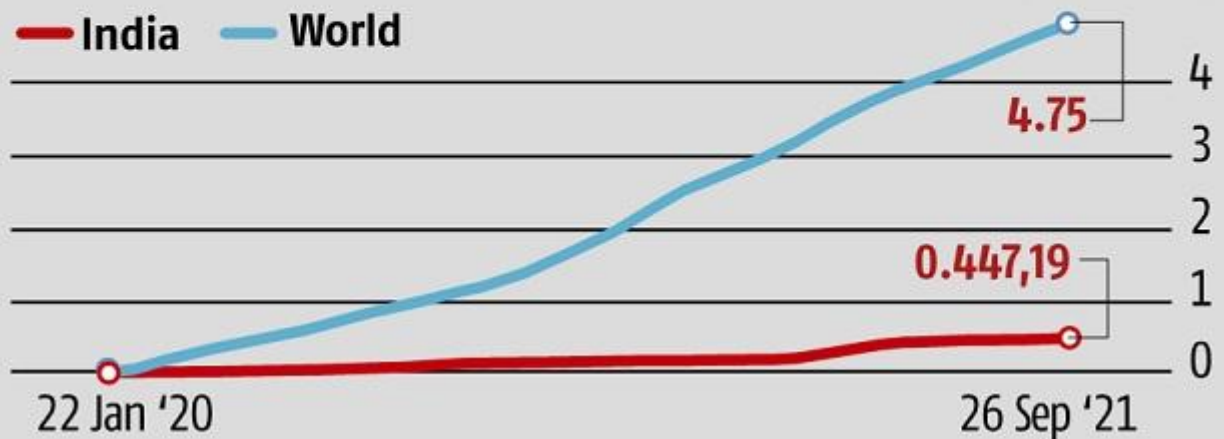
In the United States, the rise in mortality was mainly among those of working age and those under 60, while in Europe, deaths among people aged over 60 contributed more significantly to the increase in mortality.

Kashyap appealed to more countries, including low- and middle-income nations, to make mortality data available for further studies. “We urgently call for the publication and availability of more disaggregated data to better understand the impacts of the pandemic globally,” she said.

The impact of Covid-19 on lifespans may be greater in less developed countries that weren't included in the research.

CUMULATIVE CONFIRMED COVID-19 DEATHS

Limited testing and challenges in the attribution of the cause of death means that the number of confirmed deaths may not be an accurate count of the true number of deaths from Covid-19



Source: John Hopkins University CSSE Covid-19 data

“Emerging evidence from low- and middle-income countries, such as Brazil and Mexico, that have been devastated by the pandemic suggests that life-expectancy losses may be even larger in these populations,” the researchers said, noting that losses in life expectancy are also likely to vary between subgroups within countries.

Before the pandemic, life expectancy at birth had continuously increased in most countries for generations. Covid-19, though, “triggered a global mortality crisis”, the magnitude of which hasn’t been witnessed since World War II in Western European countries such as Spain, England & Wales, Italy, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland and Portugal. And the losses observed in Eastern European nations exceeded those after the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc, except for Lithuania and Hungary

Only Denmark and Norway, who have excelled at controlling their outbreaks, avoided drops in life expectancy across both sexes, the study found.

Worldwide, more than 231.8 million Covid-19 cases and 4.7 million deaths have been reported, though researchers say the official toll is a gross underestimate. The US is predicted to have about 777,000 Covid fatalities by the end of the year, according to modelling this month by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at University of Washington.

The researchers cautioned against viewing Covid-19 as “a transient shock to life expectancy”. There is evidence of potential lingering harm from long-Covid and delayed care for other illnesses, compounded by the health effects of widening inequality from the pandemic’s social and economic disruption. “The scars of the Covid-19 pandemic on population health may be longer-lasting,” they said.

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