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Quarter of Covid deaths not caused by virus, figures show

Calls to speed up roadmap as data records people dying 'with' disease rather than from it

By Sarah Knapton, SCIENCE EDITOR and Ben Riley-Smith, POLITICAL EDITOR

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Almost a quarter of [registered Covid deaths](#) are people who are not dying from the disease, new official figures show, as the Government was urged to move faster with the roadmap in the light of increasingly positive data.

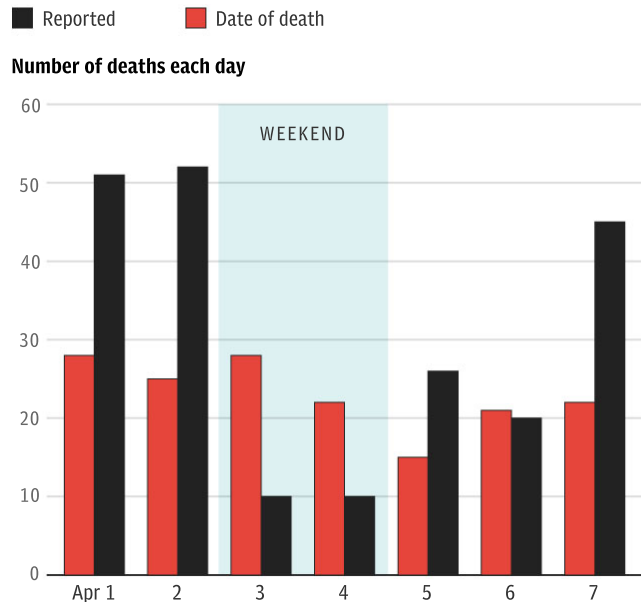
Latest figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) show that 23 per cent of coronavirus deaths registered are now people who have died "with" the virus rather than 'from' an infection.

This means that while the person who died will have tested positive for Covid, that was not the primary cause of their death recorded on the death certificate.

Other data also shows an [increasingly positive picture of the state of the pandemic in the UK](#).

Daily death figures by "date of death" reveal that Britain has had no more than 28 deaths a day since the beginning of April, even though the Government-announced deaths have been as high as 60. This is because the Government gives a daily update on deaths based on the number reported that day, which can include deaths from days or weeks previously and therefore may not reflect the true decline in deaths.

Date of death v reported date of death in UK



SOURCE: PUBLIC HEALTH ENGLAND

On Tuesday the Government announced that there had been 23 further deaths.

Likewise, Oxford University has calculated that the number of people in hospital with an active coronavirus infection is likely to be around half the current published daily figure. Tuesday's official figure showed there were 2,537 Covid patients in hospital with 230 new admissions.

However, despite the positive statistics [Boris Johnson issued a caution over the lifting of lockdown](#) as he said it was the restrictions, not the vaccine rollout, that predominantly had kept Covid numbers low.

"It is very, very important for everybody to understand that the reduction in these numbers - in hospitalisations and in deaths and in infections - has not been achieved by the vaccination programme," he said.

"People don't, I think, appreciate that it's the lockdown that has been overwhelmingly important in delivering this improvement in the pandemic and in the figures that we're seeing.

"So yes of course the vaccination programme has helped, but the bulk of the work in reducing the disease has been done by the lockdown."

The Prime Minister cautioned that case numbers will rise in the coming weeks as people gather in pub gardens and visit shops again, with Number 10 carefully watching changes in the data.

He added that "at the moment I can't see any reason for us to change the road map, to deviate from the targets that we have set ourselves".

Tory MPs privately noted that Mr Johnson's comments on the vaccine struck a more cautious note than those used by Matt Hancock, the Health Secretary, in a letter also issued on Tuesday to MP colleagues.

In that letter, parts of which *The Telegraph* has seen, Mr Hancock said "it is because of the success of the vaccination rollout", alongside falling infection cases and hospitalisations, that "we are able carefully to lift restrictions" across the UK.

[Nicola Sturgeon, the Scottish First Minister, brought forward the reopening of non-essential shops.](#) The speeding up of her reopening timetable comes after Mark Drakeford, the First Minister of Wales, brought forward indoor mixing in Wales by a week.

MPs urged the Prime Minister to also be driven by the positive data.

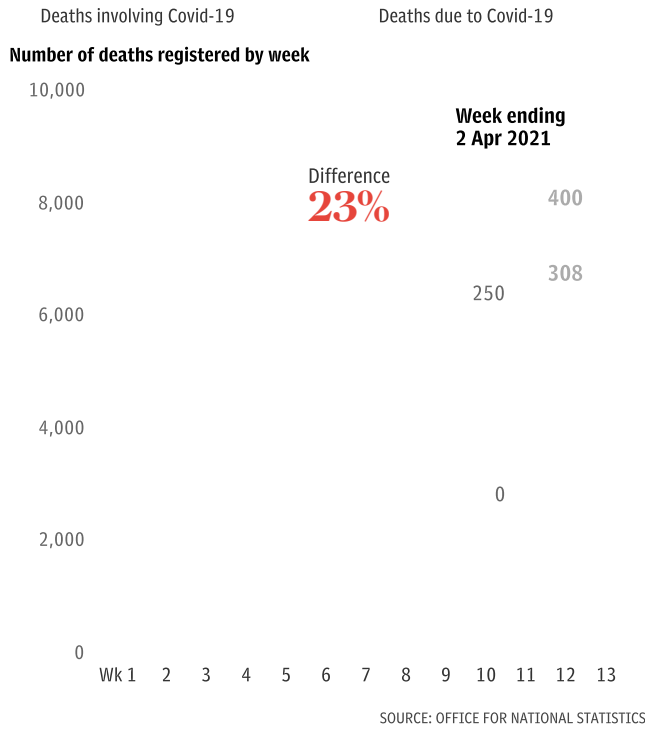
Steve Baker, deputy chairman of the Covid Research Group of Tory MPs sceptical about lockdown, told *The Telegraph*: "I know the Prime Minister is worried about case data in other countries. But we were promised the vaccine would break the link between cases, hospitalisations and deaths.

"We've been told repeatedly it has done. So of course we're looking to the Prime Minister to follow the data so that we can end the other harms that come with restrictions and lockdown.

"The sooner we're talking about the crisis in cancer care, the sooner we'll be solving it."

Covid deaths now make up just 4.9 per cent of deaths registered in England and Wales compared with 45 per cent in mid-January, according to the ONS.

Covid deaths in England and Wales



Prof Carl Heneghan, director of the Centre for Evidence Based Medicine at Oxford University, said: “All the data is highly reassuring. There is becoming a case over the next couple of weeks to bring forward the reopening of hospitality, but that’s offset with caution around big events.

“The issue is as we go about our daily lives, there will be a slight increase in cases but the key is not to panic. I think this over-cautiousness can be overcome by using a data driven approach.”

Experts also said it was clear the vaccination was having a "major" impact, with the death rate for over-60s now close to that of the under-60s despite being 43 times higher at the January peak.

Kevin McConway, emeritus professor of applied statistics, at the Open University, said: “There’s nothing in the death registration data that proves for certain that the differences in trends between older and younger people are caused by the vaccination, but vaccination must surely be playing a very major role.

“I’m not complacent and we must still be careful, now that restrictions on what we can do are being lifted. But the news so far is good.”

More than 32 million people have now had a vaccine in the UK, with the Government announcing on Monday that [the target of offering a jab to all those over 50](#), care home residents, those who are classed as vulnerable and those who work in health or social care had been reached.

However, a new analysis based on the fact that NHS England has said 19 out of 20 of those most at risk have had the jab suggests that [1.3 million vulnerable people have not yet taken up the offer of a vaccine.](#)

It is believed the Prime Minister's cautious message is being deliberately stressed now so that people will not be overly alarmed if Covid cases numbers begin to rise again throughout April.

Mr Johnson has said since first announcing his reopening roadmap back in February that Covid cases would rise as restrictions eased. Downing Street believes the correct balance has been struck between limiting virus spread and helping businesses.

A well-placed senior government source downplayed any quickening of the reopening roadmap for England, stressing the current "earliest date" targets remained.

The Department of Health and Social Care has been approached for comment.

Read more: [The light at the end of the Covid tunnel is closer than we think](#)

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