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The world has reached the grim milestone of one million COVID-19 deaths

According to the Worldometer coronavirus dashboard, the number of COVID-19 deaths globally surpassed 1 million on Sunday morning, US Eastern Time. The Johns Hopkins dashboard, more commonly cited in the American media, puts the figure over 995,000, and by all accounts, will register one million deaths today.

This massive tragedy is an indictment of the ruling classes which have allowed such misery to rain on the working class populations who have suffered the brunt of this pandemic.

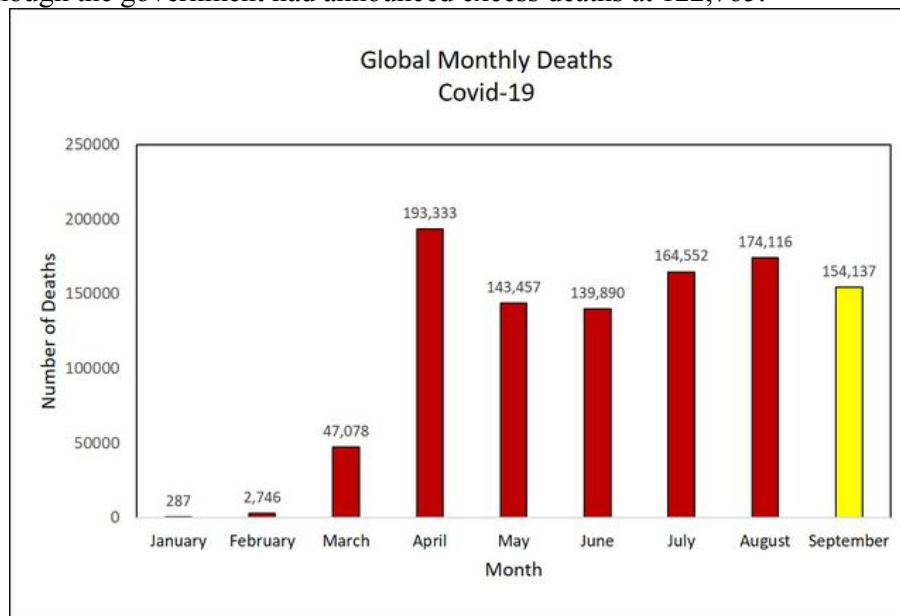


A healthcare worker pushes the body of a man who died of COVID-19 to the spot where his family will wait for a funeral home to take him away, outside the General Hospital in La Paz, Bolivia, Thursday, July 23, 2020. (AP Photo/Juan Karita)

The United States, with 209,361 deaths, leads every other nation in this horrific category. Brazil takes second place with 141,503 deaths, followed by India, with 95,162 deaths, and Mexico, with 76,243 deaths.

Right-wing authoritarian rulers in the first three countries, Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro and Narendra Modi, and the “left” populist demagogue Andrés Manuel López Obrador, in the fourth, have embraced identical policies of letting the infection rip through the population without serious resistance. These four horsemen of death account for half the world’s total.

Mexico has consistently averaged close to 500 deaths daily, and by all experts, the official reports have been gross underestimates. Earlier this month, the government shamefully announced they had run out of death certificates. By Aug. 1, the official death count was 69,095 though the government had announced excess deaths at 122,765.



Graph of monthly global deaths. Credit: wsws.org

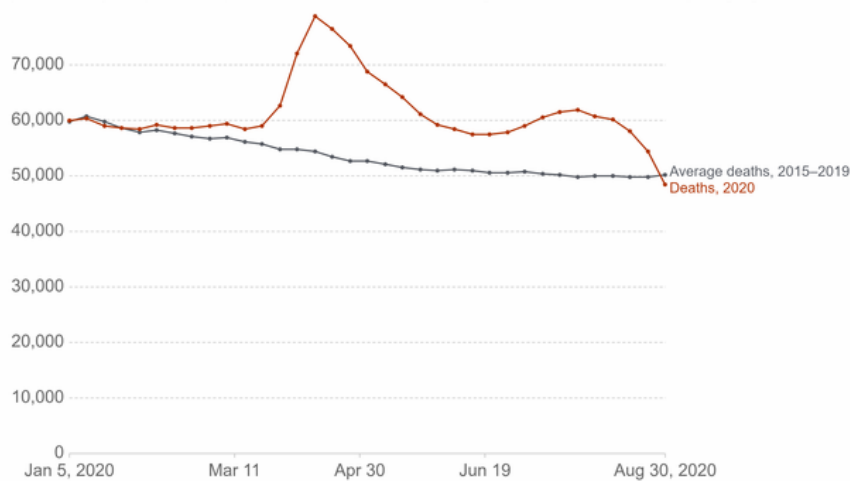
As Figure 1 demonstrates, daily global deaths have remained nearly stable since peaking in April. The column for September marked in yellow is a projection that the last four days will see, on average, about 5,300 deaths per day using the latest seven-day average estimate. By all accounts, the limited response and measures that have been employed throughout the pandemic have only stabilized the impact of the virus around the world. However, as winter approaches for the far more populous northern hemisphere, case numbers and deaths are expected to begin climbing again.

To the figure of one million officially killed by COVID-19 must be added hundreds of thousands who have perished with the cause of death signed off by the medical examiners or health authorities as unknown, or cardiopulmonary or organ failure, concealing the true impact of the pandemic from family members and the public at large.

Excess mortality during COVID-19: The raw number of deaths from all causes compared to previous years, United States

Shown is how the raw number of weekly deaths in 2020 differs from the average number of deaths in the same week over the previous five years (2015–2019). Note that deaths in recent weeks might be undercounted due to reporting lags.

Our World
in Data



Source: Human Mortality Database (2020)

Note: Dates refer to the last day in each week for most but not all countries. More details can be found in the Sources tab.

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Excess death in the United States. Credit: Our World in Data

According to the *Economist*, between March and August, all-cause mortality data for western Europe, some Latin American countries, the United States, Russia and South Africa from March to August showed 900,000 excess deaths. However, only 580,000 fatalities were attributed to COVID-19. This suggests that the real number of fatalities due to COVID-19 is 55 percent higher than the tallies maintained by Worldometer and Johns Hopkins, which are based on official death reports.

the *Economist* also remarks that the US death toll may be underestimated by 30 percent, placing the actual figure closer to 300,000. By their estimates, the real global death toll due to the pandemic may be closer to two million.

Some of these excess deaths are a byproduct of the social impact of the pandemic rather than the virus itself. The social crisis surrounding lockdowns and financial hardships have led people to avoid seeking medical attention for health issues out of legitimate fear of contracting the coronavirus.

Tom Inglesby, director of the Center for Health Security at Johns Hopkins University, told the *Wall Street Journal*, “For a long period of time there was a pretty dramatic drop-off in ER visits, elective-surgery screenings, things that Americans do all the time to keep themselves healthy.”

Weekly estimates for deaths due to heart attacks, Alzheimer’s and dementia, diabetes and strokes consistently have been above the baseline in the months from March to August. According to data from Boston University, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Pennsylvania, 20 percent of excess deaths were linked to other factors than COVID-19, with poor communities hit worst.

Providing context for the magnitude of this preventable tragedy, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention registered 2,813,503 deaths in 2017. The “normal” death toll in 2020 would have been roughly similar. This means that COVID-19 has already accounted for a nearly ten percent increase in US deaths this year, with several months still left to go.



Homeless encampment in Buenos Aires. Credit: Ronaldo Schemidt.

The one million COVID-19 deaths worldwide is more than the 690,000 people who succumbed to AIDS-related illnesses in 2019, according to World Health Organization figures. In 2016, malaria, which afflicted 216 million people, led to 445,000 deaths. In 2018, tuberculosis killed 1.5 million people.

The economic impact from the pandemic falls hardest on the poorest people, with the closure of schools leading to setbacks in education gains, a halt in critical vaccination programs and lessened access to health care and pharmaceuticals. This means that the impact of the pandemic will continue to ripple across the globe for many years after it subsides or a vaccine is found.

The World Bank predicts that the number of impoverished people who live on less than two dollars a day will climb from 70 to 100 million this year. In July, Oxfam wrote in a media brief that by the end of the year, 12,000 people per day could die from hunger linked to COVID-19, more than the number dying now from the disease itself.

Oxfam wrote, “The pandemic is the final straw for millions of people already struggling with the impacts of conflict, climate change, inequality, and a broken food system that has impoverished millions of food producers and workers. Meanwhile, those at the top are continuing to make a profit: eight of the biggest food and drink companies paid out over \$18 billion to shareholders since January, even as the pandemic was spreading across the globe.”

In 2019, over 821 million people were categorized as food insecure, with approximately 149 million suffering from “crisis-level hunger or worse.” The World Food Program estimates that the number will rise to 270 million by year’s end, an increase of 82 percent.

The critical question that remains is to what extent has the globe acquired sufficient immunity that most of the population is protected from the transmission of the virus. In a cross-sectional study published in the *Lancet* on Friday on the prevalence of SARS-CoV-2 antibodies in a large nationwide sample of patients on dialysis found that less than ten percent of the US adult population had been exposed and developed an immune response.

An estimate on 279 serological surveys conducted across 19 countries found that approximately 500 to 730 million people worldwide, or 6.4 to 9.3 percent of the total, have been infected.

Critical also in this global equation is vaccine development against SARS-CoV-2 and access to these potentially life-saving measures. Should these trials for the vaccines be conducted ethically and appropriately, by all accounts, the necessary data will not be available until the spring or summer of next year. Additionally, the manufacturing and distribution of vaccines will most likely be used as a political ploy to force lopsided trade deals and financial traps.

The death of these million-plus people is a clear indication that the financial oligarchs and the capitalist mode of production have abdicated any responsibility for their criminal response to the pandemic. By any measure, the pandemic still has much fuel to burn through, and only the working class has a vital interest in putting this fire out immediately. Only they have the capacity to prevent this further loss of life.

28 September 2020