

Over 20.5 million years of life may have been lost due to COVID-19

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This scanning electron microscope image shows SARS-CoV-2 (yellow)—also known as 2019-nCoV, the virus that causes COVID-19—isolated from a patient, emerging from the surface of cells (blue/pink) cultured in the lab. Credit: NIAID-RML

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globally, with an average of 16 years lost per death, according to a study published in *Scientific Reports*. Years of life lost (YLL)—the difference between an individual's age at death and their life expectancy—due to COVID-19 in heavily affected countries may be two to nine times higher than YLL due to average seasonal influenza.

Héctor Pifarré i Arolas, Mikko Mýrskylä and colleagues estimated YLL due to COVID-19 using data on over 1,279,866 deaths in 81 countries, as well as [life expectancy](#) data and projections for total deaths of COVID-19 by country.

The authors estimate that in total, 20,507,518 years of life may have been lost due to COVID-19 in the 81 countries included in this study—16 years per individual death. Of the total YLL, 44.9% seems to have occurred in individuals between 55 and 75 years of age, 30.2% in individuals younger than 55, and 25% in those older than 75. In countries for which death counts by gender were available, YLL was 44% higher in men than in women. Compared with other global common causes of [death](#), YLL associated with COVID-19 is two to nine times greater than YLL associated with seasonal flu, and between a quarter and a half as much as the YLL attributable to [heart conditions](#).

The authors caution that the results need to be understood in the context of an ongoing pandemic: they provide a snapshot of the possible impacts of COVID-19 on YLL as of 6 January, 2021. Estimates of YLL may be over- or under-estimates due to the difficulty of accurately recording COVID-19-related deaths.

More information: Years of life lost to COVID-19 in 81 countries, *Scientific Reports* (2021). [DOI: 10.1038/s41598-021-83040-3](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-83040-3) , www.nature.com/articles/s41598-021-83040-3

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