

UN: COVID-19 deaths for people over 80 are 5 times average

2 May 2020, by Edith M. Lederer



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U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said Friday that the COVID-19 pandemic is causing "untold fear and suffering" for older people around the world who are dying at a higher rate, and especially for those over age 80, whose fatality rate is five times the global average.

The U.N. chief said that beyond the [health risks](#), "the pandemic is putting older people at greater risk of poverty," with an especially devastating impact on the elderly in developing countries.

Guterres issued a 16-page policy briefing on the impact of COVID-19 on older people with several key messages, most importantly that "no person, young or old, is expendable" and "older people have the same rights to life and health as everyone else."

The secretary-general, who celebrated his 71st birthday Thursday, said: "As an older person myself, with responsibility for an even older mother, I am deeply concerned about the pandemic on a personal level, and about its effects on our communities and societies."

He called for improved [social support](#) and "smarter efforts" to use digital technology to reach older people who may face great suffering because of isolation and restrictions on their movements.

Guterres said all social, economic and humanitarian responses to the pandemic must take the needs of older people into account, noting that the majority are women who are more likely to enter their later years in poverty, without access to [health care](#).

He also said older people must not be treated as "invisible or powerless," pointing out that many are working and fully engaged in [family life](#), teaching, learning and looking after others.

"To get through this pandemic together, we need a surge in global and national solidarity and the contributions of all members of society, including older people," Guterres said in a video message accompanying the [policy report](#) that also stressed the importance of building "age-friendly societies."

The report warns that not only are those over 80 dying at five times the average rate from the new coronavirus but "an estimated 66% of people aged 70 and over have at least one underlying condition, placing them at increased risk of severe impact from COVID-19."

According to the report, over 95% of fatalities due to COVID-19 in Europe have been people 60 and older. In the United States, 80% of deaths are among adults 65 and over, it said, and in China, approximately 80% of deaths occurred among adults aged 60 or older.

The report warned that "the mortality rate for older persons could climb even higher" as COVID-19 spreads to developing countries, "likely overwhelming health and social protection systems."

In the midst of the pandemic, the U.N. report said, overburdened hospitals and [medical facilities](#) face [difficult decisions](#) around the use of scarce resources.

Human rights experts have noted with concern that decisions about using these resources, including ventilators, "have in some cases been made based on age, or on generalized assumptions about the impact of a particular diagnosis, such as dementia, on overall health, life expectancy or chances of survival," the report said.

"Less visible but no less worrisome," it said, "are the broader effects: health care denied for conditions unrelated to COVID-19; neglect and abuse in institutions and care facilities; an increase in poverty and unemployment; the dramatic impact on well-being and mental health; and the trauma of stigma and discrimination."

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