

# COVID-19 takes nine million years of life from people in the US

21 September 2021



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A microsimulation study found that mortality burden of the COVID-19 pandemic may be far greater than death statistics suggest. The researchers found that the pandemic cut aggregate U.S. life expectancy by more than 9 million years, with Black and Hispanic persons losing more than twice as many quality adjusted life years (QALY) per capita compared to their White peers. The findings are published in *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

Measuring the [mortality](#) burden of the COVID-19 pandemic is about more than excess deaths. Focusing solely on excess deaths from the COVID-19 pandemic can underestimate its effect on young and middle-aged adults who have a longer life expectancy than older, sicker adults. Understanding disproportionate mortality rates by race/ethnicity is also important. Calculating years of life lost (YLLs) and QALY by demographics and risk factors may provide greater perspective into the true mortality burden of the pandemic.

Using [data](#) from the Health and Retirement Study, Panel Study of Income Dynamics, and CDC and CMS data, researchers from the University of

Southern California leveraged their Future Adult Model and Future Elderly Model to measure YLLs and QALYs lost from the COVID-19 pandemic, by age, sex, race/ethnicity, and comorbidity. The researchers measured YLLs and QALYs lost per 10,000 persons in the population accounting for key demographic information, along with obesity, smoking behavior, and other [risk factors](#) for [death](#) from COVID-19. They found that the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in 9.08 million years of excess lost life through March 2021, with 4.67 million years lost by those aged 25 to 64 years. The greatest toll was on Black and Hispanic communities, especially among men aged 65 years or older. The researchers estimate that 38% of excess deaths during the first year of the [pandemic](#) would have otherwise had average or above-average life expectancies for their subgroup.

According to the study authors, these findings suggest that the mortality burden of COVID-19 is more substantial than previously thought among younger and middle-aged adults and is especially high for Black and Hispanic Americans.

**More information:** Julian Reif et al, Measuring the COVID-19 Mortality Burden in the United States, *Annals of Internal Medicine* (2021). [DOI: 10.7326/M21-2239](#)

Provided by American College of Physicians

APA citation: COVID-19 takes nine million years of life from people in the US (2021, September 21) retrieved 20 January 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-09-covid-million-years-life-people.html>

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