

Data on dementia and Covid-19

The latest information published by the Office of National Statistics today (15 May 2020)ⁱ ⁱⁱ shows starkly the enormous impact the Covid-19 crisis is having on people with dementia.

There were 33,841 people who died with Covid-19 recorded on their death certificates in March and April in England and Wales. 12,526 deaths were care home residents, 72.2% of whom died in the care home and 27.5% died in hospital. 14.6% of all deaths in hospital were care home residents. This should be monitored in order to ensure people in care homes, 70% of whom are living with dementiaⁱⁱⁱ, are able to access critical care in hospitals or high-quality palliative care in the care home.

Dementia as a pre-existing condition

- The most common main^{iv} pre-existing condition for people dying of Covid-19 in England and Wales was “dementia and Alzheimer’s disease”^v, with 6,887 deaths (20.4% of Covid-19 deaths) in March and April 2020. This an increase from 14% looking just at data from March
- Taking into account all pre-existing conditions, not just the main condition that contributed to the persons death, the most common pre-existing condition^{vi} for people dying of Covid-19 in England and Wales in March and April 2020 was dementia with 8,577 people, 25.3% of total Covid-19 deaths.
- Dementia was the most common main pre-existing condition found among deaths involving COVID-19 in care homes and was involved in 5,115 deaths or 42.5% of all deaths of care home residents involving Covid-19 in the year to date in England and Wales.
- For over 70s, 4,177 men and 4,173 women have died with Covid-19 and dementia in March and April 2020 overall. 2094 people over the age of 90 who have the main pre-existing condition of dementia have died of Covid-19 in March and April 2020. Covid-19 is a disease that disproportionately affects older people, as is dementia.

This rapid increase in the rate of people dying with Covid-19 who also have dementia is consistent with the spread of Covid-19 in care homes – between 13 March and 3 April, there were 217 deaths from Covid-19 in residential care homes, but between 4 April and 1 May, there were 8,093. Given the high prevalence of dementia in care homes and higher than average age, people with dementia have been particularly vulnerable as the disease has spread.

Dementia is still the UK’s leading cause of death after Covid-19

- In April, there were a further 9,429 people deaths from dementia alone in England and 462 in Wales of people without a diagnosis of Covid-19, making dementia the second highest cause of death after Covid-19.
- Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, more people in care homes still died of dementia than Covid-19 – 25.4% people died of Covid-19 in England and Wales in March and April while 28.25% died of dementia. This was particularly true in women, for whom 32.9% of deaths were from dementia = compared to 23.5% for Covid-19.

Even during times of a pandemic, and the fact this data demonstrates more people with dementia are dying of Covid-19 than people with any other condition, we cannot ignore the people who are dying of dementia during this crisis. In normal times, dementia is the UK’s biggest killer according to the ONS.^{vii}

- Even apart from Covid-19, in April deaths from dementia in England were 80% higher than usual and 50% higher in Wales.^{viii}

This is likely driven by both a number of deaths from Covid-19 of people with dementia from people with dementia that are not registered as such due to a lack of widespread testing in care homes and the community, and the deaths of people with dementia who do not have Covid-19 due to disruption of their normal care pathway. People who are unable or afraid to access care, who may lose support from social services or primary care or be denied access to their family and loved ones, are being abandoned by the Government.

ⁱ ONS (2020) [Deaths involving COVID-19, England and Wales: deaths occurring in April 2020](#)

ⁱⁱ ONS (2020) [Deaths involving COVID-19 in the care sector, England and Wales: deaths occurring up to 1 May 2020 and registered up to 9 May 2020 \(provisional\)](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ Wittenberg, R (2018) [The Costs of Dementia in England](#), *International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*, Volume 34, Issue 7

^{iv} This attempts to identify the one condition that would be most likely to be the underlying cause of death had that person not died from Covid-19. It would be part of the causal sequence that led to someone dying with Covid-19.

^v This is the Office of National Statistics category for all forms of dementia – this briefing will herein use “dementia” when referring to this ONS category.

^{vi} This includes people who had pre-existing dementia before contracting deaths and where dementia may have been a contributory factor, but it was not part of the causal sequence.

^{vii} Alzheimer's Society (2019) [The UK's biggest killer: why are deaths from dementia on the rise?](#)

^{viii} Compared with the five-year average, the rate of deaths due to Dementia and Alzheimer disease was significantly higher in April 2020, at 208.9 deaths per 100,000 persons compared with 113.8 deaths per 100,000 persons for the five-year average in England and 168.3 deaths per 100,000 persons in April 2020 compared with 108.7 deaths per 100,000 persons for the five-year average.