



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Jo Churchill
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Prevention,
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The Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP
By email to: george.howarth.mp@parliament.uk

23 September 2020

Dear Sir George,

Thank you for your recent correspondence. Owing to the unprecedented situation in which we find ourselves, I am currently unable to respond to every individual letter personally.

This is not what I would wish; however, in order to prevent further delay to you and your constituents, I have asked an official to reply on my behalf and this is enclosed.

I hope the enclosed reply is helpful.

JO CHURCHILL



Department
of Health &
Social Care

From Marie Turner
Head of Ministerial Correspondence and Public Enquiries

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The Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP
By email to: george.howarth.mp@parliament.uk

23 September 2020

Dear Sir George,

Thank you for your correspondence of 17 April on behalf of your constituents, about the release of data pertaining to daily non-hospital COVID deaths. I have been asked to reply and I apologise for the delay in doing so, which has been caused by an unprecedented volume of correspondence in recent months.

Deaths reported by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) are based on the cause of death recorded on death certificates. These can include cases where the doctor thought it likely that the person had COVID-19, even when there was no positive test result.

The deaths reported by the ONS will include deaths that are not included in the Public Health England (PHE) definition, which is that a positive test result was confirmed by a PHE or NHS laboratory. They may also exclude cases that are included in the PHE definition because, although the patient had a positive test for COVID-19, this was not mentioned on the death certificate. However, in general, the numbers of deaths reported by the ONS will be larger than those included in the PHE definition. More information on the PHE definition can be found at www.gov.uk by searching for 'COVID-19 investigation and initial clinical management of possible cases'.

All the deaths data shown on coronavirus.data.gov.uk are for people who have had a positive test result confirmed by a PHE or NHS laboratory. They also include, for England, deaths of people who have had a positive test result confirmed through testing done by commercial partners.

The data does not include deaths of people who had COVID-19 but had not been tested, people who tested positive only via a non-NHS or PHE laboratory, or people who had tested negative and subsequently caught the virus and died. People who have tested positive for COVID-19 could, in some cases, have died from something else. Deaths are only included in these figures if they occur within 28 days of a positive test. This makes the recording more accurate, because cases where a person has tested positive but then died from other causes some months later are excluded.

Data on COVID-19 deaths in England are produced by PHE. These data are taken from three different sources:

- NHS England: deaths in hospitals are reported by NHS trusts, using the COVID-19 Patient Notification System;
- PHE Health Protection Teams: the local teams report deaths notified to them, which will mainly be deaths not in hospitals;
- linking data on confirmed positive cases to the NHS Demographic Batch Service: when a patient dies, the NHS central register of patients is notified. The list of all lab-confirmed cases is checked against the NHS central register each day, to check if any of the patients have died.

Data on deaths from these three sources are linked to the list of people who have had a diagnosis of COVID-19 confirmed by a PHE or NHS laboratory. This is to identify as many people with a confirmed case who have died as possible.

Notifications of deaths will often come from more than one source, so the records are checked and merged into one database and duplicates are removed. Automated processes are used to ensure that the data are as complete as possible. Full details of the process of producing the data are available on coronavirus.data.gov.uk/about-data. As referred to above, deaths that occurred more than 28 days after a positive test are removed.

The final list of deaths therefore includes all those previously reported by NHS England, and those that were confirmed cases, whether they died in hospital or elsewhere, provided death occurred within 28 days of a test.

In order to improve the timely availability of data on deaths in care homes caused by COVID-19, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) have agreed to publish the provisional number of deaths in care homes, based on statutory notifications by care home providers to the CQC.

The figures are published as part of the ONS's weekly deaths release, and include:

- the total number of deaths in England per day, where the death was in a care home and was notified by the care home operator as involving COVID-19; and
- the number of deaths in care homes by local authority in England per week, divided into all deaths and deaths notified as involving COVID-19.

The weekly deaths release can be found at www.ons.gov.uk by searching for 'deaths registered weekly in England and Wales provisional statistical bulletins'.

Deaths where the care home provider has stated COVID-19 as a suspected or confirmed cause of death take on average four days to receive and process. Moreover, weekly registrations are 11 days behind because of the time taken to register, process and publish.

It should also be noted that the opinion of care home providers on the cause of death in the notification to the CQC may differ from the death certification based on the medical judgement of the certifying doctor.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Turner', with a stylized, cursive script.

MARIE TURNER