

Fact Check

Fact Check: Study does not say COVID vaccines may have fuelled excess deaths

By Reuters Fact Check

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Reuters

FACT CHECK

A newly released study does not say COVID-19 vaccines may have fuelled excess deaths across the world, contrary to claims on social media.

The journal which published the analysis has [issued a statement](#)  calling news from “various outlets” about the paper “misreporting” and emphasising that “the research does not support the claim that vaccines are a major contributory factor to excess deaths since the start of the pandemic”.

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Health data experts interviewed by Reuters also said that while the paper, published by BMJ Public Health, discusses excess mortality during the 2020-2022 pandemic, it does not say COVID vaccines were driving the deaths.



A newly published study does not say COVID vaccines may have fuelled excess deaths, contrary to claims on social media.

But widely shared social media posts citing a Daily Telegraph article on the study said the research vindicates previous claims of a link between vaccines and excess deaths.

“Finally, mainstream media acknowledgement in the UK,” [said one post](#) on X that included a screenshot of the Telegraph headline, “Covid vaccines may have helped fuel rise in excess deaths”. The X post, which received more than four million views, was from an account that has previously [shared misleading information](#) about COVID vaccines.

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WHAT THE STUDY SHOWED

“The researchers looked only at trends in excess mortality over time, not its causes,” the statement from BMJ Public Health said.

Public health data scientists also told Reuters the paper did not establish a link to vaccines and said it actually showed excess deaths had begun falling in 2022.

Excess deaths are an estimation of the number of mortalities during a specific time period above and beyond what would be expected based on past patterns, [according](#) to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

During the COVID pandemic, there were around 1 million excess deaths across 47 Western countries in 2020, 1.2 million the following year and 800,000 by 2022, the study said, basing its calculations on numbers from [Our World in Data](#) .

[Figures](#) from the World Mortality Dataset (WMD) - which tracks the impact of the pandemic - show excess mortality in the same 47 countries fell to 175,000 in 2023, contrasting with the Telegraph headline’s suggestion of a continued “rise” in excess deaths.

“The paper says there were excess deaths in most of these countries in 2020 and it didn’t stop in 2020, it continued in 2021 and 2022,” data scientist Jeffrey Morris, a professor of public health and

preventive medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, said in a phone interview. "Honestly, that is all this paper shows. I don't know why they published this paper."

'INSINUATION' WITHOUT EVIDENCE

The analysis does mention certain COVID vaccines and suspected harms but does not say they are a cause of excess deaths.

"Although COVID-19 vaccines were provided to guard civilians from suffering morbidity and mortality by the COVID-19 virus, suspected adverse events have been documented as well," the authors write in the paper's introduction.

"Consensus is also lacking in the medical community regarding concerns that mRNA vaccines might cause more harm than initially forecasted," they add later in the discussion section.

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"The study's authors don't say it's the vaccines causing the excess deaths," Stuart McDonald, deputy chair of the [Continuous Mortality Investigation](#), said in a phone interview. "But they insinuate. There's this insinuation that it's all about the lockdowns and the vaccines, which just isn't supported by the data."

If someone wanted to make the case that it was the vaccines causing the harm, McDonald said, comparing [WMD data](#) on excess deaths with Our World In Data [figures](#) on vaccine uptake, then one very big problem they would need to explain was why the highest-vaccinated countries - New Zealand, Denmark and Australia - had the lowest excess deaths and the least-vaccinated - for example, Albania, Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro - had the highest excess deaths.

No one disputed that people had been harmed, but the cases were very rare, and, on balance, vaccines had significantly reduced mortality around the world, McDonald added.

Charts by academics Ariel Karlinsky and Dmitry Kobak, who created the WMD, indicate a simpler explanation, McDonald said. They show excess mortality peaks line up with COVID death peaks.

The study's lead author and The Telegraph did not respond to requests for comment.

The Netherlands-based Princess Máxima Center for Pediatric Oncology, which is linked to three of the study's four authors, issued a statement distancing itself from the study.

"We, as the Princess Máxima Center, want to emphasize that we strongly support vaccination and that this publication should certainly not be read as an argument against vaccination," it said.

"The study in no way demonstrates a link between vaccinations and excess mortality; that is explicitly not the researchers' finding. We therefore regret that this impression has been created."

World Child Cancer released a statement saying it was wrongly listed as having funded the study.

Reuters has previously addressed misleading claims that public mortality data indicate COVID vaccines as a cause of widespread deaths.

VERDICT

False. The study offers no evidence of an ongoing rise in excess deaths following the COVID-19 pandemic or of a causal link between COVID vaccines and excess deaths.

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