

See all News



High Covid death rates skewed by people who died from other causes, admits Sajid Javid

Health Secretary reveals daily government figures might be unreliable as ONS data show fewer deaths registered to Covid

By Sarah Knapton, SCIENCE EDITOR

19 January 2022 • 8:37pm

449

Daily reported Covid death figures are too high because people are dying from conditions [unrelated to the virus](#) after testing positive, Sajid Javid has admitted.

[On Wednesday](#), there were 359 deaths reported in Britain, but the Health Secretary said that “many” people were being included in the count who “would not have necessarily died of Covid”.

His comments came after death data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) show a large discrepancy in weekly death registrations compared to the figures released on the Government dashboard.

For the week ending Jan 7, the UK Health Security Agency reported 1,282 deaths of people who had died within 28 days of testing positive for coronavirus.

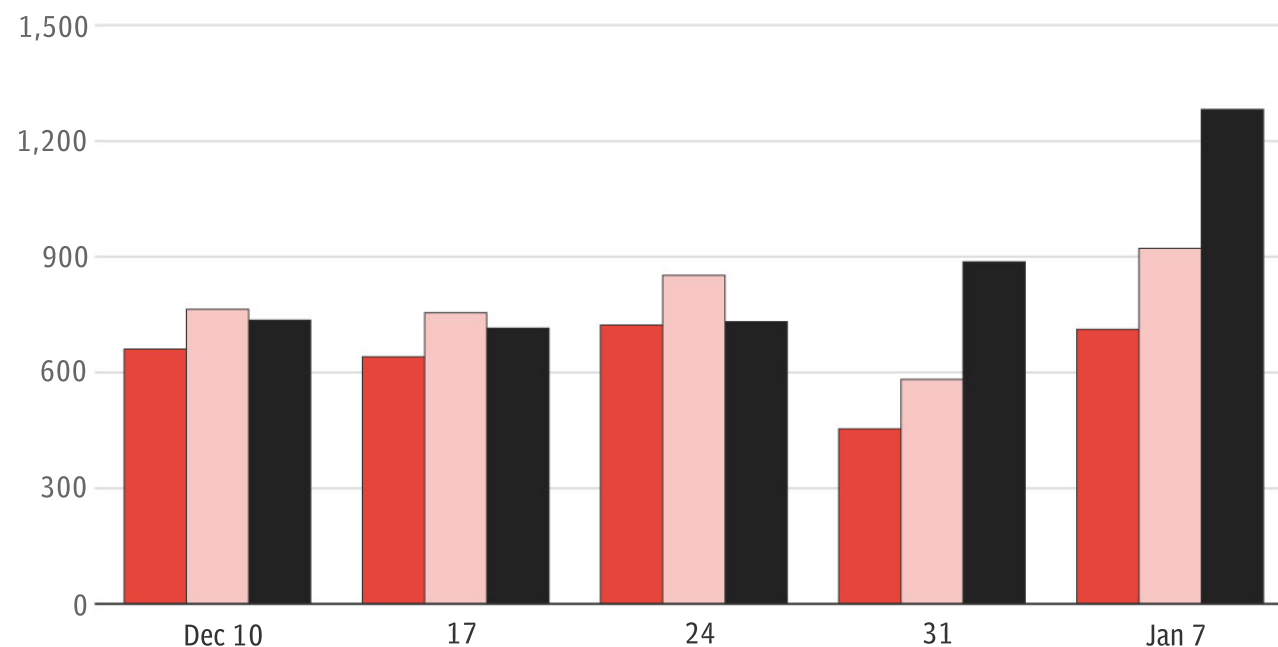
However, ONS data show there were just 992 death registrations with Covid mentioned on the death certificate in that week.

For deaths where Covid was the primary cause, the difference is even starker, with just 712 registrations, meaning that 44 per cent of the Government’s daily reported figures in that week may not be true Covid deaths.

Covid deaths in England and Wales

■ Deaths from Covid (ONS) ■ Total Covid deaths (ONS) ■ Weekly reported deaths (UKHSA)

Deaths for week ending



2021

2022

At a Downing Street press conference on Wednesday, Mr Javid warned that the daily figures are [no longer reliable](#) because of the [surge in omicron infections](#).

“We estimate that around 40 per cent of the people with [Covid in hospital](#) are there not because they’ve got Covid, but they happen to have Covid, so it’s what you might call [an incidental infection](#),” he said.

“That’s almost double the percentage that we saw with delta, and that’s important because the deaths that are being reported of people who were Covid-positive within 28 days of passing away, many of those people would not have necessarily died of Covid.”

Before omicron hit, the number of deaths reported by the ONS was consistently higher than the Government dashboard data because their figures include people who have died at hospital and in care homes.

However, the trend has since changed, with dashboard figures way higher than those published by the ONS.

The ONS has warned that the new year bank holiday will have pushed some deaths, which would usually be registered in the first week of January, into the second week.

However Susan Hopkins, the chief medical adviser at the UK Health Security Agency, confirmed that people were being swept up in the daily death figures who would not be classed as true Covid deaths.

“Deaths within 28 days, we regard as a leading indicator and we monitor this very carefully. But it doesn’t take into account people who have died with Covid,” she said.

“Given the very large number of cases that we’ve diagnosed in the last number of weeks, we will sadly see some people, particularly the very elderly, who die within 28 days of a case of Covid.”

Warnings about skewed death figures

[In December](#), experts predicted that such a [steep rise in omicron cases](#) would lead to skewed death figures because a certain number of people testing positive would be expected to die naturally anyway.

[The January death rate](#) is about 0.09 per cent, according to the ONS. So on a day of 244,000 infections as we saw at the peak, we may expect 219 of those people to die naturally over the next month, yet currently all would end up in the Covid data.

Most of these natural deaths will occur in hospitals or care homes where patients and residents are being regularly tested, and where there have often been outbreaks of omicron.

Latest figures for England show that 44 per cent of all Covid patients currently in hospital were admitted for reasons other than the virus, and are “incidental” cases.

However, people may also now be included in the death figures who cleared the virus weeks before their death.

Dr Raghieb Ali, a consultant in acute medicine at Oxford University Hospitals NHS Trust, warned last week that the death data was likely to be inaccurate because of the high omicron

case numbers. On Wednesday, he said that the discrepancy was starting to become apparent in the data.

Related Topics

Omicron variant, Conservative Party, Coronavirus, Sajid Javid

    |  449

The Telegraph values your comments but kindly requests all posts are on topic, constructive and respectful. Please review our [commenting policy](#).

Show comments

More stories

More from Politics



Boris Johnson frustrated with Rishi Sunak over ‘resistance’ to new nuclear power plants

By Edward Malnick

19 Mar 2022, 8:21pm



Labour trying to 'open floodgates' for Russian political donations, claims Boris Johnson

By Edward Malnick
19 Mar 2022, 5:31pm



Jacob Rees-Mogg to reduce government focus on ethical contracts

By Ben Gartside
19 Mar 2022, 5:28pm



Freeport hopes of P&O's Dubai owner at risk after mass sackings

By Oliver Gill
19 Mar 2022, 5:24pm



Vladimir Putin in 'total panic' about revolution in Moscow, says Boris Johnson

By Marcus Parekh
▶ 19 Mar 2022, 1:53pm



Rishi Sunak considered resigning over National Insurance U-turn row, he told fellow MP

By Ben Riley-Smith
19 Mar 2022, 7:00am

More from The Telegraph

Follow us on:



[Contact us](#)

[About us](#)

[Telegraph Extra](#)

[Reader Prints](#)

[Branded Content](#)

[Syndication and Commissioning](#)

[Guidelines](#)

[Privacy](#)

[Terms and Conditions](#)

[Advertising Terms](#)

[Fantasy Sport](#)

[UK Voucher Codes](#)

[Betting Offers](#)

[Modern Slavery](#)

[Tax Strategy](#)

[Broadband and Mobile Deals](#)

[Manage Cookies](#)

© Telegraph Media Group Limited 2022