

# Obesity a big risk factor for severe COVID-19, study confirms

8 March 2021, by Ernie Mundell



(HealthDay)—Yet another study confirms what doctors have long known: Being obese greatly raises the odds that if you contract COVID-19, your case could be a severe one.

The study, from researchers at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, supports calls for obese Americans to move to the head of the line for protective vaccines.

"These findings highlight clinical and public health implications of higher BMIs, including the need for intensive management of COVID-19-associated illness, continued vaccine prioritization and masking, and policies to support healthy behaviors," wrote a team led by Lyudmyla Kompaniyets, of the CDC COVID-19 Response Team.

In the study, researchers pored over data on more than 148,000 patients treated for COVID-19 at 238 U.S. hospitals between March and December 2020. In this cohort, "28.3% had overweight and

50.8% had [obesity](#)," Kompaniyets' group reported.

"Overweight and obesity were [risk factors](#) for [patients requiring] invasive mechanical ventilation, and obesity was a risk factor for hospitalization and death," the CDC team said, especially for people under 65 years of age. As clinicians develop care plans for COVID-19 patients, they should consider the risk for severe outcomes in patients with higher BMIs, especially for those with severe obesity, they added.

The findings will probably be of little surprise to physicians who have seen the sometimes deadly combination of obesity and [coronavirus](#) infection play out in hospital wards.

"Since the beginning of the pandemic, many of us treating patients have noted the propensity for obese and [overweight individuals](#) to have more severe illness," said Dr. Amesh Adalja, a senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, in Baltimore. "This is true with other [respiratory viruses](#), as well, as obesity does compromise respiratory fitness and has many other metabolic effects."

Dr. Robert Glatter is an emergency medicine physician at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City. Reading over the report, he noted that obesity already produces "inflammatory effects" in the body, putting patients at a disadvantage when COVID-19 strikes.

Glatter said the findings underscore "the importance of prevention strategies, such as continued vaccine prioritization and masking."

Last week, one global investigation found that the risk of death from [coronavirus infection](#) is about 10 times higher in countries where most of the population is overweight.

The World Obesity Federation report found that

88% of deaths due to COVID-19 in the first year of the pandemic were in countries where more than half of the population is classified as overweight, the *Washington Post* reported. Having a body mass index (BMI) above 25 is considered overweight.

The results prompted the London-based federation to urge governments to prioritize overweight and obese people for both coronavirus testing and vaccinations, the *Post* reported.

Among the nations with overweight populations above the 50% threshold were also those with some of the largest proportions of coronavirus deaths, including countries such as Britain, Italy and the United States, the *Post* reported. In the United States, nearly three-quarters of the population is considered overweight or obese, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. So far, more than 524,000 Americans have died from COVID-19.

Conversely, in countries where less than half of the adult population is classified as overweight, the risk of death from COVID-19 was about one-tenth of the levels in countries with higher shares of overweight adults. A higher BMI was also associated with increased risk of hospitalization, admission to intensive or critical care, and the need for mechanically assisted ventilation, the *Post* said.

For individuals carrying extra pounds, the solution to easing the threat from COVID-19 is clear, according to Glatter.

"Preventative health strategies that focus on daily exercise, healthy eating and moderation, along with a focus on mental health awareness, can be invaluable," he said.

The new study was published March 8 in the CDC's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.

**More information:** There's information about weight-loss strategies that work at the [American Heart Association](#).

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