

# COVID-19 SENTINEL HOSPITAL SURVEILLANCE UPDATE



NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR  
COMMUNICABLE DISEASES

Division of the National Health Laboratory Service

SOUTH AFRICA WEEK 26 2020

## OVERVIEW

**This report summarises data of COVID-19 cases admitted to sentinel hospital surveillance sites in all provinces. The report is based on data collected from 5 March to 28 June 2020.**

## HIGHLIGHTS

- As of 28 June, 14 555 COVID-19 admissions were reported from 278 facilities (74 public-sector and 204 private-sector) in all nine provinces of South Africa. There was an increase of 3 855 new admissions since the last report, and 9 additional hospitals (3 public-sector and 6 private-sector) reporting COVID-19 admissions. There were 7 396 (51%) and 7 159 (49%) admissions reported in public and private sector respectively. The majority of COVID-19 admissions were reported from four provinces, 8 909 (61%) in Western Cape, 2 688 (19%) in Gauteng, 1 088 (8%) in Eastern Cape and 1 007 (7%) in KwaZulu-Natal.
- The median age of COVID-19 admissions was 50 years; 474 (3%) admissions in patients ≤18 years and 1 908 (13%) in >70 years. Fifty four percent (7 860/14 555) were female.
- Among 10 876 (75%) patients with data on comorbid conditions; 3 756 (35%) had one comorbid condition, 2 554 (24%) had two comorbid diseases and 1 422 (13%) had three or more comorbid conditions. Of the 7 732 patients who had a comorbid condition, the most commonly reported were hypertension 4 510 (58%) and diabetes 3 770 (49%); and there were 1 479 (19%) patients admitted with HIV, 304 (4%) with active tuberculosis (TB) and 746 (10%) patients with previous history of tuberculosis.
- Obesity, while not consistently recorded for all reported COVID-19 admissions, was noted by clinicians as a risk factor in 423 (3%) patients.
- Of the 1 455 admissions, 4 250 (29%) patients were in hospital at the time of this report, 8 189 (56%) patients were discharged alive or transferred out and 2116 (15%) patients had died. There were 601 additional deaths since the last report.
- Of the 10 159 COVID-19 patients who had recorded in-hospital outcome (died and discharged), 2116 died, equating to a case fatality ratio (CFR) of 21%. On multivariable analysis, factors associated with in-hospital mortality were older age groups; male sex; admission in the public sector and in Eastern Cape and Free State provinces; and having comorbid hypertension, diabetes, chronic cardiac disease, chronic renal disease, malignancy, HIV and active tuberculosis.

# METHODS

DATCOV19, sentinel hospital surveillance for COVID-19 admissions, was initiated on the 1 April 2020. Data are submitted by public and private hospitals that have agreed to report COVID-19 admissions through DATCOV19 surveillance in all nine provinces of South Africa. A COVID-19 case was defined as a person with a positive reverse transcriptase polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) assay for SARS-CoV-2 who was admitted to a DATCOV19 sentinel hospital. An individual was defined as having severe disease if treated in high care or intensive care unit (ICU), or ventilated or diagnosed with acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS). Case fatality ratio (CFR) was calculated for all closed cases, i.e. COVID-19 deaths divided by COVID-19 deaths plus COVID-19 discharges, excluding individuals who are still admitted in hospital.

Data are received from all private hospitals nationally, from all public hospitals in the Western Cape (WC) Province and 26 public hospitals in the other eight provinces. As new hospitals join the surveillance system, they have retrospectively captured all admissions recorded. As of 28 June 2020, a total of 278 facilities, 74 from public sector and 204 from private sector, submitted data on hospitalised COVID-19 cases (Table 1). There were 9 additional hospitals (3 public-sector and 6 private-sector) reporting COVID-19 admissions since the last report.

Table 1: Number of hospitals reporting data on COVID-19 admissions by province and sector, South Africa, 5 March-28 June 2020

Name of province	Public Sector	Private Sector
Eastern Cape (EC)	8	12
Free State (FS)	4	14
Gauteng (GP)	5	74
KwaZulu-Natal (KZN)	5	37
Limpopo (LP)	1	6
North West (NW)	2	12
Northern Cape (NC)	1	6
Western Cape (WC)	48	36
Mpumalanga (MP)	0	7
<b>South Africa</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>204</b>

# RESULTS

## Epidemiological and geographic trends in admissions

From 5 March to 28 June, a total of 14 555 COVID-19 admissions (3 855 additional from last report) were reported from 278 facilities in all nine provinces of South Africa. Of these admissions, 7 396 (50.8%) and 7 159 (49.2%) were reported in public and private sector, respectively. Initially, most admissions were reported in the private sector; from week 17 a higher proportion of total admissions was reported in the public sector; and since week 24 a higher proportion was reported in the private sector. The decrease in reported admissions in the last epidemiological week is likely due to a delay in the submission of data from the hospitals (Figure 1).

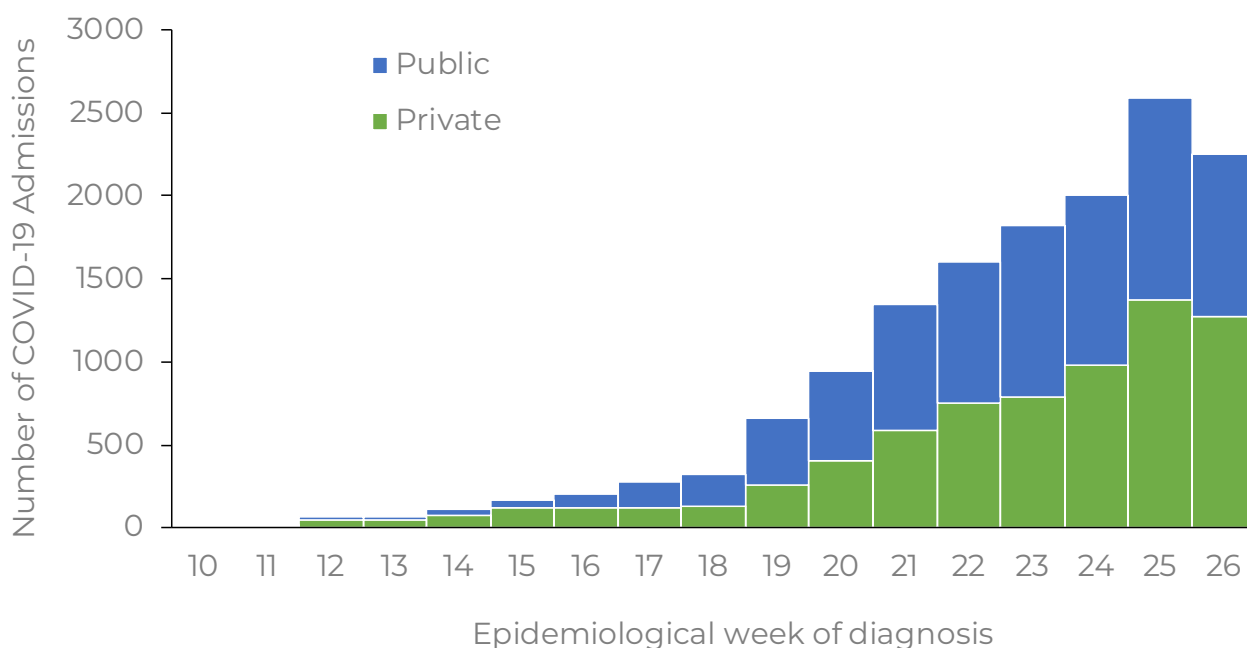


Figure 1. Number of reported COVID-19 admissions by health sector and epidemiologic week of diagnosis, 5 March-28 June 2020, n=14 555

The majority of admissions (13 692/14 555, 94.1%) were recorded in four provinces, with the highest number reported in Western Cape (8 909/14 555, 61.2%), followed by Gauteng (2 688/14 555, 18.5%), Eastern Cape (1088/14555, 7.5%), and KwaZulu-Natal (1 007/14 555, 6.9%) provinces. While Western Cape experienced an increase in admissions from week 18, the increase in Gauteng began in week 23 (Figure 2).

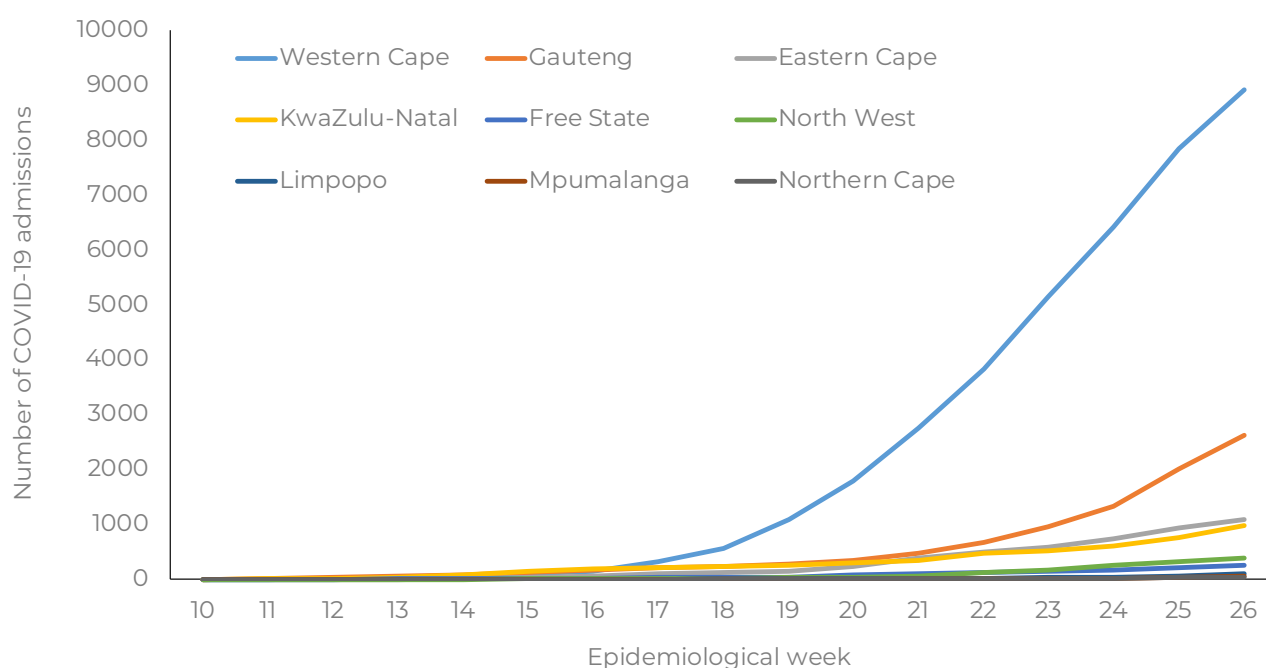


Figure 2. Cumulative numbers of reported COVID-19 admissions, by province and epidemiological week of diagnosis, South Africa, 5 March-28 June 2020, n=14 555

# DEMOGRAPHIC AND CLINICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF ADMISSIONS

The median age of COVID-19 admissions was 50 years (interquartile range [IQR] 37 – 61). There were 474 (3.3%) admissions in patients 18 years and younger and 1908 (13.1%) in patients older than 70 years. Among admitted individuals with COVID-19, 7 860 (54.0%) were female. The sex ratio varied by age group with females more common than males in all age groups except in patients younger than 10 years (Figure 3).

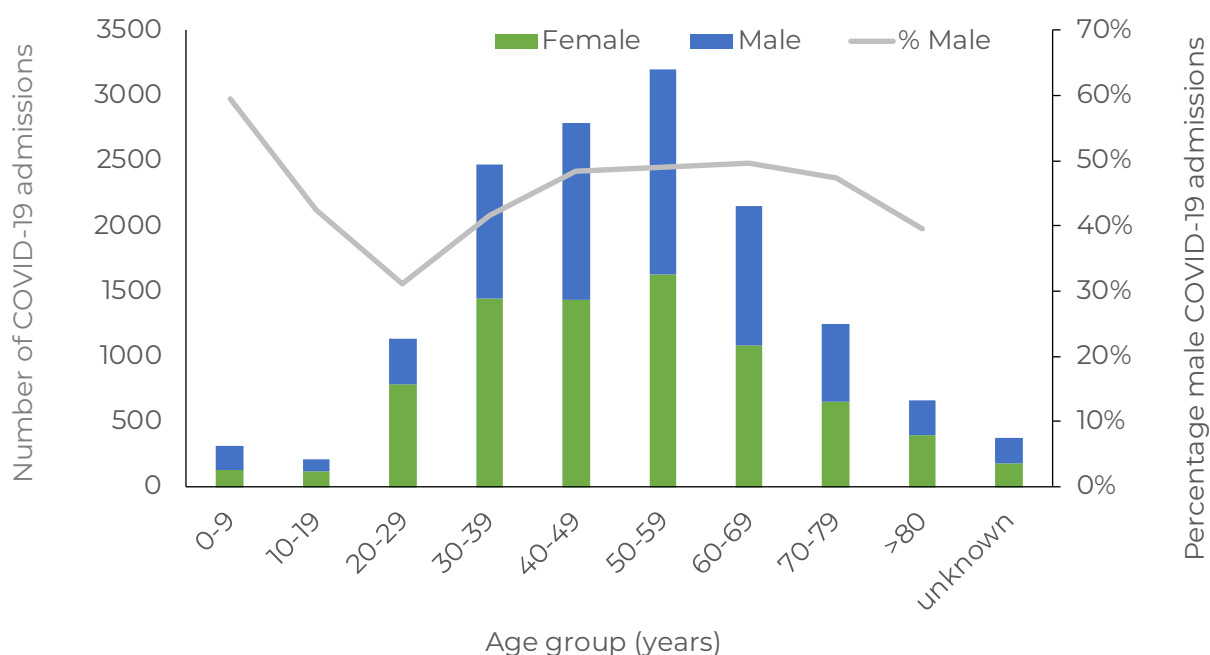


Figure 3. Number of reported COVID-19 admissions by age, gender and percentage of males, South Africa, 5 March-28 June 2020, n=14 555

Of the 6 179 (42.4%) patients for whom race was known, 4 210 (68.1%) were Black African, 1 008 (16.3%) were Coloured, 362 (5.9%) were Indian, 576 (9.3%) were White and 23 (0.4%) were classified as Other race group. There were 376 (2.6%) health care workers (HCW) that were reported to be hospitalised. Among the 7 860 female admissions, there were 413 (5.3%) females admitted who were pregnant or within 6 weeks post-partum.

Of the 10 876 (74.7%) patients for whom comorbid disease was known, 3 144 (28.9%) had no comorbid disease reported, 3 756 (34.5%) had one comorbid disease reported, 2 554 (23.5%) had two comorbid diseases and 1 422 (13.1%) had three or more comorbid diseases reported. Among the 7 732 patients who had reported a comorbid condition, the most commonly reported comorbid conditions were hypertension (4 510/7 732, 58.3%) and diabetes (3 770/7 732, 48.8%); there were 1 479/7 732 (19.1%) patients who were HIV-infected, 304/7 732 (3.9%) patients with active tuberculosis (TB) and 746/7 732 (9.6%) patients with previous history of TB (Table 2). Obesity, while not consistently recorded for all reported COVID-19 admissions, was recorded as a risk factor in 423 (2.9%) of all patients hospitalised.

Table 2. Reported comorbid diseases among COVID-19 admissions reporting at least one comorbid disease, South Africa, 5 March-28 June 2020, n=7 732\*

Comorbid disease**	n	%
Hypertension	4 510	58.3%
Diabetes mellitus	3 770	48.8%
Chronic cardiac disease	309	4.0%
Chronic pulmonary disease/ Asthma	1 170	15.1%
Chronic renal disease	592	7.7%
Malignancy	127	1.6%
HIV	1 479	19.1%
Active tuberculosis	304	3.9%
Previous history of tuberculosis	746	9.6%

\* Multiple comorbid conditions would be counted more than once so the total number may be more than the total number of individuals reporting comorbid conditions

\*\* Presence of a comorbid disease includes only the conditions reported in the table; obesity is not included

## DISEASE SEVERITY

Of the 14 555 COVID-19 admissions to date, 3 276 (22.5%) met the criteria for severe disease. The median age of patients who had severe disease was 53 (IQR 44 – 63) years; compared to 49 (IQR 36 – 61) years for those who did not have severe disease. Amongst all admissions to date, 1 968 (13.5%) patients were treated in ICU and 1551 (10.7%) were treated in High Care; 836 (5.7%) were ventilated and 3 104 (21.3%) received supplemental oxygen. The proportion of reported in-patients who were treated in ICU and ventilated in each epidemiological week decreased from week 15, but in the past four weeks there has been an increased proportion of patients who were treated in ICU (Figure 4).

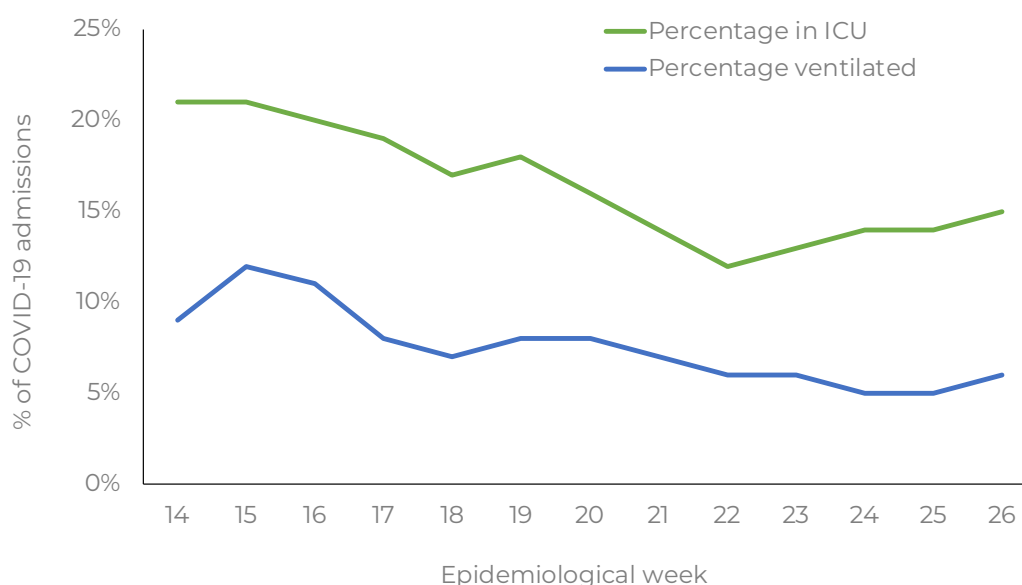


Figure 4. Proportion of COVID-19 in-patients treated in intensive care unit (ICU) and ventilated by epidemiological week, South Africa, 28 March-28 June 2020\*

\*Data on ventilation and ICU care was not reliable prior to epidemiological week 14

## OUTCOMES

Of the 14 555 admitted individuals, 4 250 (29.2%) were currently in hospital, 8 043 (55.3%) were discharged alive, 146 (1.0%) were transferred out to either higher level care or step-down facilities and 2 116 (14.5%) had died. There were 601 additional deaths since the last report. Of the 10 159 COVID-19 patients who had recorded in-hospital outcome (died and discharged), 2116 died, equating to a case fatality ratio (CFR) of 20.8%.

## EPIDEMIOLOGICAL AND GEOGRAPHIC TRENDS IN MORTALITY

There has been an increasing trend in reported number of deaths and the CFR among hospitalised individuals increased with each month of admission – March 11.8%, April 18.3%, May 19.7% and June 22.5%, however these differences were not statistically significant. In the first few weeks of the outbreak most deaths were reported in the private sector but since week 17 a higher proportion of reported deaths was in the public sector (Figure 5). The CFR was higher in the public health sector (24.4%) than in the private health sector (16.2%) ( $p < 0.001$ ).

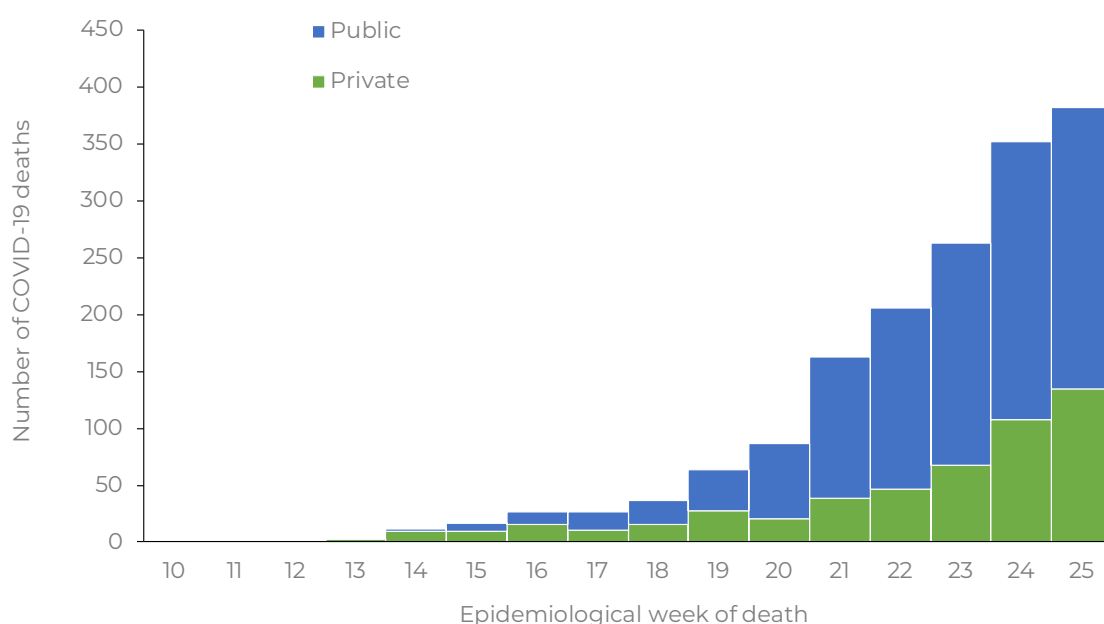


Figure 5. Number of COVID-19 deaths reported per week by health sector and epidemiologic week, South Africa, 5 March-28 June 2020,  $n=2\,116$

Most deaths were reported in Western Cape (1 562, 73.8%), followed by Eastern Cape (244, 11.5%) and Gauteng (197, 9.3%) (Figure 6). However, compared to Western Cape province (22.1%), the CFR was significantly elevated in Eastern Cape province (35.4%), and significantly lower in Free State (7.3%) province.



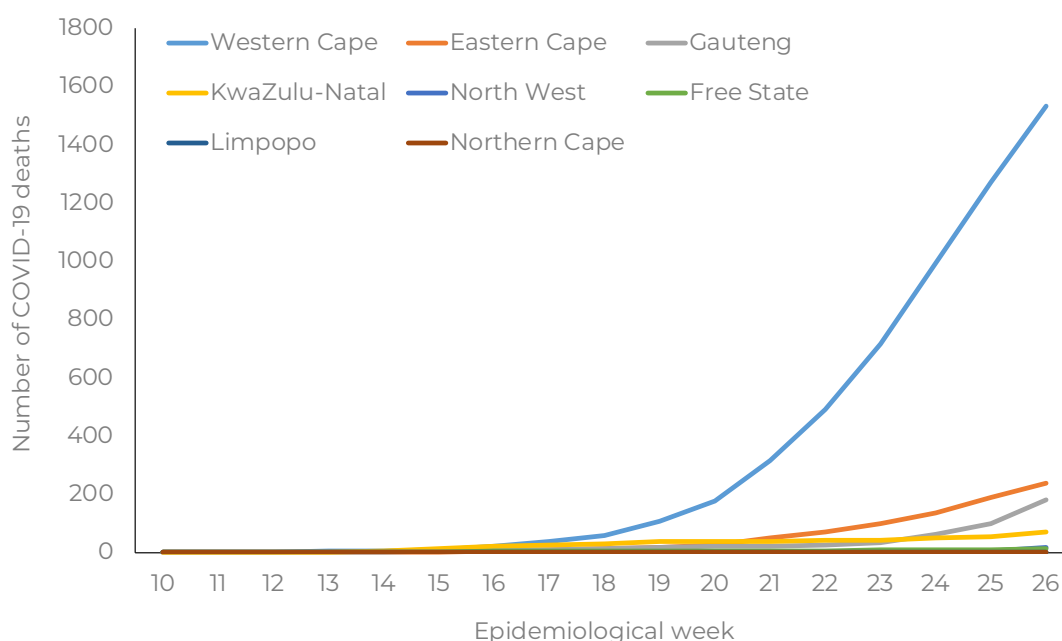


Figure 6. Cumulative numbers of reported COVID-19 deaths, by province and epidemiological week of death, South Africa, 5 March-28 June 2020, n=2 116

## DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF DEATHS

The median age of patients who died was 61 (IQR 51 – 71) years, and for those who were still alive was 48 (IQR 36 – 59) years. There were 5 (0.2%) deaths in children  $\leq 18$  years. There were 174 (8.2%) deaths in patients younger than 40 years (Figure 7). The CFR was higher in males (23.9%) than females (18.3%) ( $p < 0.001$ ).

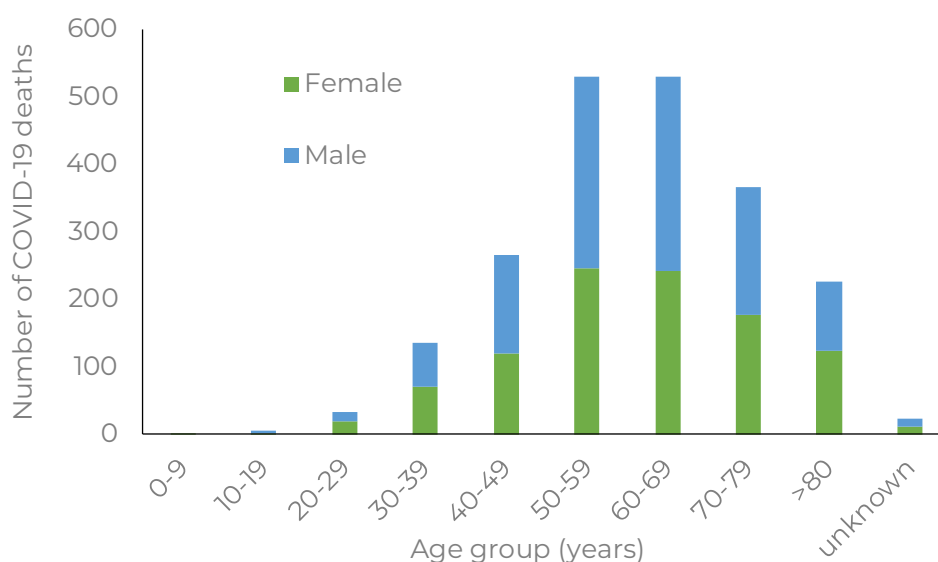


Figure 7: Number of reported COVID-19 deaths by age and gender, South Africa, 5 March-28 June 2020, n=2 116

Race was only available for 42.4% of all admissions. Where race was available, the CFR differed according to race group as follows, Black (19.8%), Coloured (22.5%), Indian (18.0%) and White (16.8%) and other race groups (33.3), however these differences were not statistically significant.

## COMMON COMORBIDITIES REPORTED AMONG DEATHS

In all age groups except <20 years, hypertension and diabetes were most commonly reported comorbidities among patients who died. In addition, in patients younger than 60 years, HIV, tuberculosis and obesity were common while in those older than 60 years, asthma/COPD and chronic renal disease were common comorbidities (Figure 8).

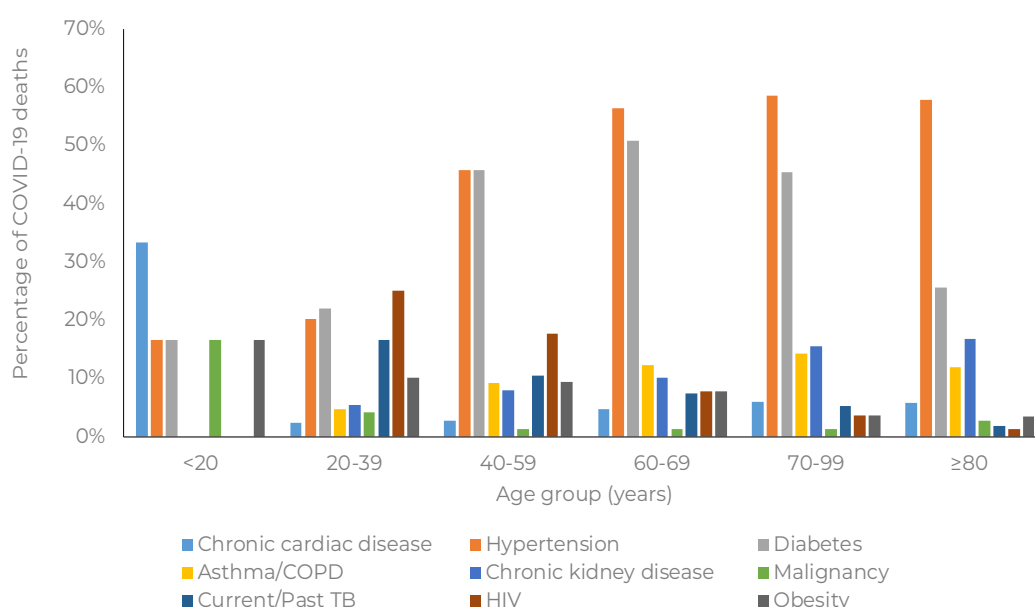


Figure 8. Frequency of comorbid conditions for reported COVID-19 deaths by age group, South Africa, 5 March-28 June 2020, n=2116

\* There were 8 people younger than 20 years that died

## FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH IN-HOSPITAL MORTALITY

On multivariable analysis, factors associated with in-hospital mortality were older age groups; male sex; admission in the public sector and in Eastern Cape and Free State provinces; and having comorbid hypertension, diabetes, chronic cardiac disease, chronic renal disease, malignancy, HIV and active tuberculosis (Table 3).



Table 3. Univariate and multivariable analysis of factors associated with mortality among 10 159 with in-hospital outcome (discharges and deaths), South Africa, 5 March-28 June 2020

Characteristic	Case-fatality ratio n/N (%)	Unadjusted OR (95% CI)	p-value	Adjusted OR (95% CI)	p-value
<b>Age group</b>					
<20 years	6/402 (1.5)	Reference		Reference	
20-39 years	1 68/2 644 (6.4)	4.5 (2.0-10.2)	<0.001	3.2 (1.2-8.7)	0.026
40-59 years	795/4 154 (19.1)	15.6 (6.9-35.1)	<0.001	9.4 (3.5-25.6)	<0.001
60-69 years	530/1 530 (34.6)	35.0 (15.5-78.9)	<0.001	17.3 (6.3-47.3)	<0.001
70-79 years	366/872 (42.0)	47.7 (21.1-108.1)	<0.001	24.5 (8.9-67.4)	<0.001
≥80 years	227/467 (48.6)	62.4 (27.3-142.6)	<0.001	36.6 (13.2-101.8)	<0.001
Unknown age	24/90 (26.7)	24.0 (9.5-60.9)	<0.001	15.6 (4.9-49.3)	0.020
<b>Sex</b>					
Female	1 012/5 546 (18.3)	Reference		Reference	
Male	1 104/4 613 (23.9)	1.4 (1.3-1.6)	<0.001	1.5 (1.3-1.7)	<0.001
<b>Race</b>					
Black	512/2 590 (19.8)	Reference			
Coloured	170/757 (22.5)	1.2 (0.97-1.4)	0.106		
Indian	35/194 (18.0)	0.9 (0.6-1.3)	0.559		
White	57/339 (16.8)	0.8 (0.6-1.1)	0.197		
Other	4/12 (33.3)	2.0 (0.6-6.8)	0.249		
Unknown	1 338/6 267 (21.4)	1.1 (0.98-1.2)	0.096		
<b>Occupation</b>					
Not Healthcare worker	2102/9914 (21.2)	Reference			
Healthcare worker	14/245 (5.7)	0.2 (0.1-0.4)	<0.001		
<b>Peri-partum</b>					
No	1 007/5235 (19.2)	Reference			
Yes	5/311 (1.6)	0.1 (0.03-0.2)	<0.001		
<b>Comorbid condition</b>					
No co-morbidity	199/3 144 (6.3)	Reference			
1 co-morbid condition	588/3 756 (15.7)	2.4 (2.1-2.9)	<0.001		
≥2 comorbid conditions	576/2 554 (22.6)	3.9 (3.2-5.0)	<0.001		
≥3 comorbid conditions	402/1 422 (28.3)	5.0 (4.16.0)	<0.001		
Unknown	351/3 679 (9.5)	1.4 (1.1-1.6)	0.001		
<b>Hypertension</b>					
No	714/4 262 (16.8)	Reference		Reference	
Yes	1 051/3 303 (31.8)	2.3 (2.1-2.6)	<0.001	1.3 (1.1-1.4)	<0.001
<b>Diabetes mellitus</b>					
No	864/4 785 (18.1)	Reference		Reference	
Yes	901/2 780 (32.4)	2.2 (2.0-2.4)	<0.001	1.5 (1.3-1.7)	<0.001

<b>Chronic cardiac disease</b>						
No	1 677/7 365 (22.8)	Reference		Reference		
Yes	88/200 (44.0)	2.7 (2.0-3.5)	<0.001	1.8 (1.3-2.5)	<0.001	
<b>Chronic pulmonary disease/Asthma</b>						
No	1 540/6 657 (23.1)	Reference				
Yes	225/908 (24.8)	1.1 (0.9-1.3)	0.271			
<b>Chronic renal disease</b>						
No	1 544/7 113 (21.7)	Reference		Reference		
Yes	2 21/452 (48.9)	3.5 (2.8-4.2)	<0.001	1.9 (1.5-2.3)	<0.001	
<b>Malignancy</b>						
No	1 729/7 486 (23.1)	Reference		Reference		
Yes	36/79 (45.6)	2.8 (1.8-4.4)	<0.001	2.8 (1.7-4.6)	<0.001	
<b>HIV</b>						
No	1 520/6 473 (23.5)	Reference		Reference		
Yes	245/1 092 (22.4)	0.9 (0.8-1.1)	0.450	1.4 (1.1-1.6)	0.001	
<b>Tuberculosis</b>						
No	1 705/7 349 (23.2)	Reference				
Yes	60/216 (27.8)	1.3 (0.9-1.7)	0.118			
<b>Past Tuberculosis</b>						
No	1 603/6 995 (22.9)	Reference				
Yes	162/570 (28.4)	1.3 (1.1-1.6)	0.003			
<b>Obesity</b>						
Unknown	1 961/9 863 (19.9)	Reference				
Yes	155/296 (52.4)	4.1 (3.1-5.4)	<0.001			
<b>Month of admission</b>						
March	21/178 (11.8)	Reference		Reference		
April	157/857 (18.3)	1.7 (1.03-2.7)	0.038	1.5 (0.8-2.7)	0.179	
May	826/4 191 (19.7)	1.8 (1.2-2.9)	0.010	1.4 (0.8-2.5)	0.223	
June	1 111/4 932 (22.5)	2.2 (1.4-3.4)	0.001	1.7 (0.98-3.0)	0.057	
<b>Health sector</b>						
Private sector	714/4 410 (16.2)	Reference		Reference		
Public sector	1 402/5 749 (24.4)	1.7 (1.5-1.8)	<0.001	1.5 (1.3-1.8)	<0.001	
<b>Province</b>						
Western Cape	1 562/7 065 (22.1)	Reference		Reference		
Eastern Cape	244/690 (35.4)	1.9 (1.6-2.3)	<0.001	2.4 (2.0-2.9)	<0.001	
Free State	14/192 (7.3)	0.3 (0.2-0.5)	<0.001	0.3 (0.2-0.6)	0.001	
Gauteng	197/1 327 (14.9)	0.6 (0.5-0.7)	<0.001	1.1 (0.9-1.3)	0.581	
KwaZulu-Natal	75/569 (13.2)	0.5 (0.4-0.7)	<0.001	0.8 (0.6-1.1)	0.277	
Limpopo	3/61 (4.9)	0.2 (0.1-0.6)	0.004	0.5 (0.1-1.6)	0.214	
Mpumalanga	0/42 (0)	Not estimated	-	Not estimated	-	
North West	20/187 (10.7)	0.4 (0.3-0.7)	<0.001	1.1 (0.6-1.8)	0.840	
Northern Cape	1/26 (3.9)	0.1 (0.02-1.04)	0.055	0.2 (0.03-1.6)	0.134	

<b>Severe**</b>			
No	1 326/8 193 (16.2)	Reference	
Yes	790/1 966 (40.2)	3.5 (3.1-3.9)	<0.001
<b>Ever ICU</b>			
No	1 547/9 026 (17.1)	Reference	
Yes	569/1 133 (50.2)	4.9 (4.3-5.5)	<0.001
<b>Ever High Care</b>			
No	1 901/9 225 (20.6)	Reference	
Yes	215/934 (23.0)	1.2 (0.98-1.4)	0.084
<b>Ever ventilated</b>			
No	1 761/9 635 (18.3)	Reference	
Yes	355/524 (67.8)	9.4 (7.8-11.4)	<0.001
<b>Ever on oxygen</b>			
No	1 615/8 562 (18.9)	Reference	
Yes	501/1 597 (31.4)	2.0 (1.7-2.2)	<0.001

\* Multivariable model excluded all individuals with unknown comorbid conditions

\*\* Severe disease was defined as any individual who was treated in high care or intensive care unit (ICU), ventilated or diagnosed with acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS).

## DISCUSSION

DATCOV currently includes 14 555 admissions from 278 public and private hospitals in all nine provinces in South Africa. It also includes 2 116 deaths that have occurred to date. The factors reported to be associated with in-hospital mortality, older age groups; male sex; and comorbid hypertension, diabetes, chronic cardiac disease, chronic renal disease, malignancy and obesity are consistent with data reported from other countries<sup>1-5</sup> In addition, this report also quantifies the increased risk of in-hospital mortality among HIV-infected individuals and patients with active tuberculosis which is consistent with data from the Western Cape Province.<sup>6</sup>

Trends in CFR over time and provincial differences may be affected by many factors such as hospital admission criteria, timeousness of closing cases, testing criteria in different provinces, and the severity of illness in admitted cases.

The availability of reliable surveillance data is of critical importance to gain a better understanding of the epidemiology of COVID-19 in South Africa, to monitor the COVID-19 epidemic and to respond with adequate control measures. It has been suggested that when local transmission is widespread and testing strategies change, hospital admission or mortality surveillance systems provide a more reliable picture of the epidemic progression than overall confirmed case numbers.

DATCOV provides real-time data and summary analyses, which inform modelling and reporting at a national level. It also addresses a knowledge gap, in the lack of data from low and middle income countries (LMIC), allowing for analysis of COVID-19 epidemiology in a country

with a younger population, unique disease profile with epidemics of both infectious (HIV and tuberculosis) and non-communicable diseases, and an overburdened public health system.

## LIMITATIONS

DATCOV is a sentinel surveillance system and does not include all hospitals with COVID-19 admissions and therefore may not be truly representative of hospital admissions for COVID-19 throughout South Africa. DATCOV only reports hospital-based admissions and deaths and therefore does not include deaths occurring outside hospitals. Data quality in a surveillance system is dependent on the information submitted by healthcare institutions. It is not possible for the NICD to verify or check the quality of all these data, however, the NICD has built-in data quality checks.

We were not able to analyse the association between time of symptom onset and mortality as these data were incomplete for >50% of individuals. Data on socioeconomic status are not collected. Data on treatment and medical interventions have not been analysed because the data were incomplete. Efforts are ongoing to improve the quality and completeness of data on symptoms and medical interventions and analysis of these data will be included in future reports.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### Private hospital groups submitting data to DATCOV19:

Netcare  
Life Healthcare  
Mediclinic Southern Africa  
National Hospital Network (NHN)  
Clinix Health Group  
Lenmed  
Joint Medical Holdings (JMH)

### Western Cape province: all public sector hospitals submitting data to DATCOV19

### Public hospitals using DATCOV19 surveillance online platform:

Dora Nginza Hospital (EC)  
Frere Hospital (EC)  
Livingstone Hospital (EC)  
Madwaleni Hospital (EC)  
Uitenhage Hospital (EC)  
Stutterheim Hospital (EC)  
Bedford Hospital (EC)  
Cradock Hospital (EC)  
Pelonomi Hospital (FS)  
National District Hospital (FS)  
Universitas Hospital (FS)  
Phekolong Hospital (FS)  
Tambo Memorial Hospital (GP)  
Steve Biko Academic Hospital (GP)  
Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital (GP)  
Helen Joseph Hospital (GP)  
Leratong Hospital (GP)  
Greys Hospital (KZN)  
Ladysmith Hospital (KZN)  
Manguzi Hospital (KZN)  
Addington Hospital (KZN)  
General Justice Gizenga Mpanza Hospital (KZN)  
Polokwane Hospital (LP)  
Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe Hospital (NC)  
Tshepong Hospital (NW)  
Job Shimankana Thabane Hospital (NW)  
Tygerberg Hospital (WC)