

How many nursing home residents died in 2020? (We still don't know)

Jessica Hockett, PhD

Meeting with NY Senator Skoufis

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Sent in advance

- “Does New York City Make Any Sense?” (Verdyn, Hockett, Engler, Kenyon, & Neil, 2023)
- Conversational article from Wood House 76 what the HERDS data doesn't say
- HERDS Nursing Home Resident COVID death data for Orange County, New York City, New York State (minus NYC)
- Hockett correspondence with HHS OIG-OEI re: “COVID-19 Had a Devastating Impact on Medicare Beneficiaries in Nursing Homes During 2020” (June 2021) and related analysis

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Jessica Hockett, PhD

- Independent researcher conducting a pro bono, open inquiry into New York City mortality patterns in spring 2020
- Began focused investigation in 2022 as a matter of public interest
- Not affiliated with any political party, advocacy group, or institution
- Research and documentation published on Substack (now WordPress (WoodHouse76.com) and (formerly) on X/Twitter
- Contributed to *Fighting Goliath: Exposing the Flawed Science and Statistics Behind the COVID-19 Event* (by Norman Fenton and Martin Neil)

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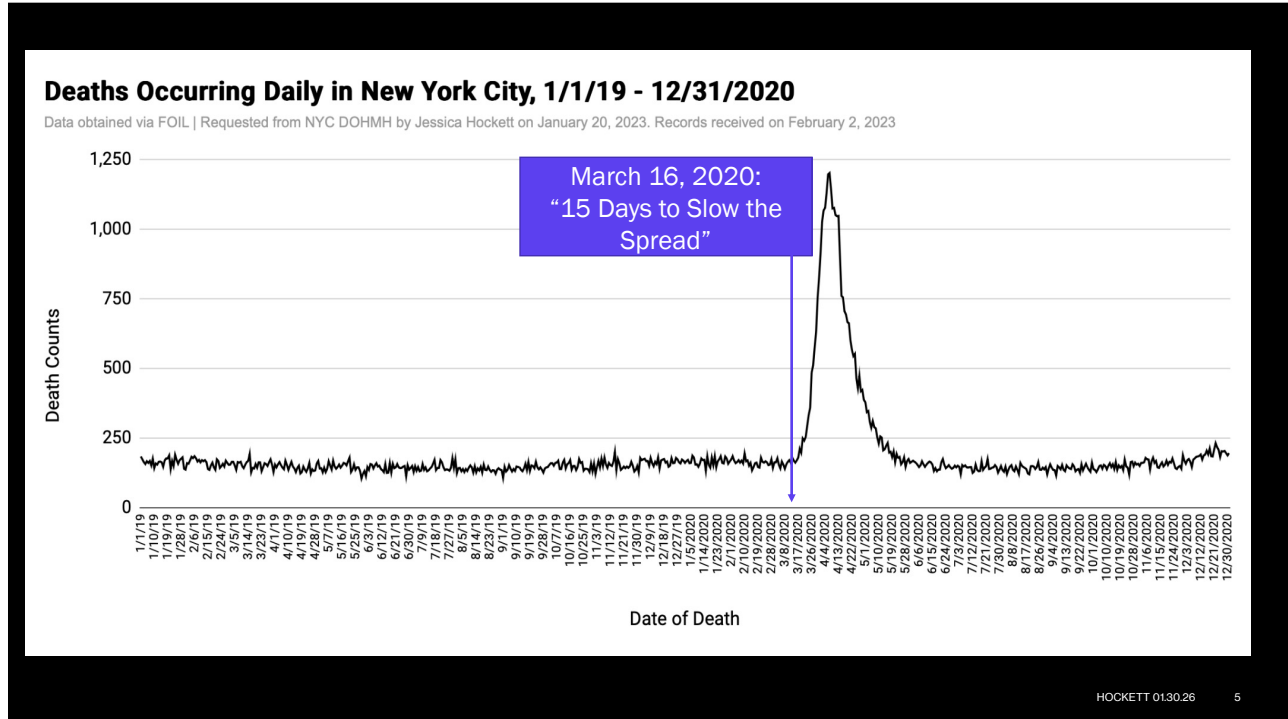
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NYC Event Approach

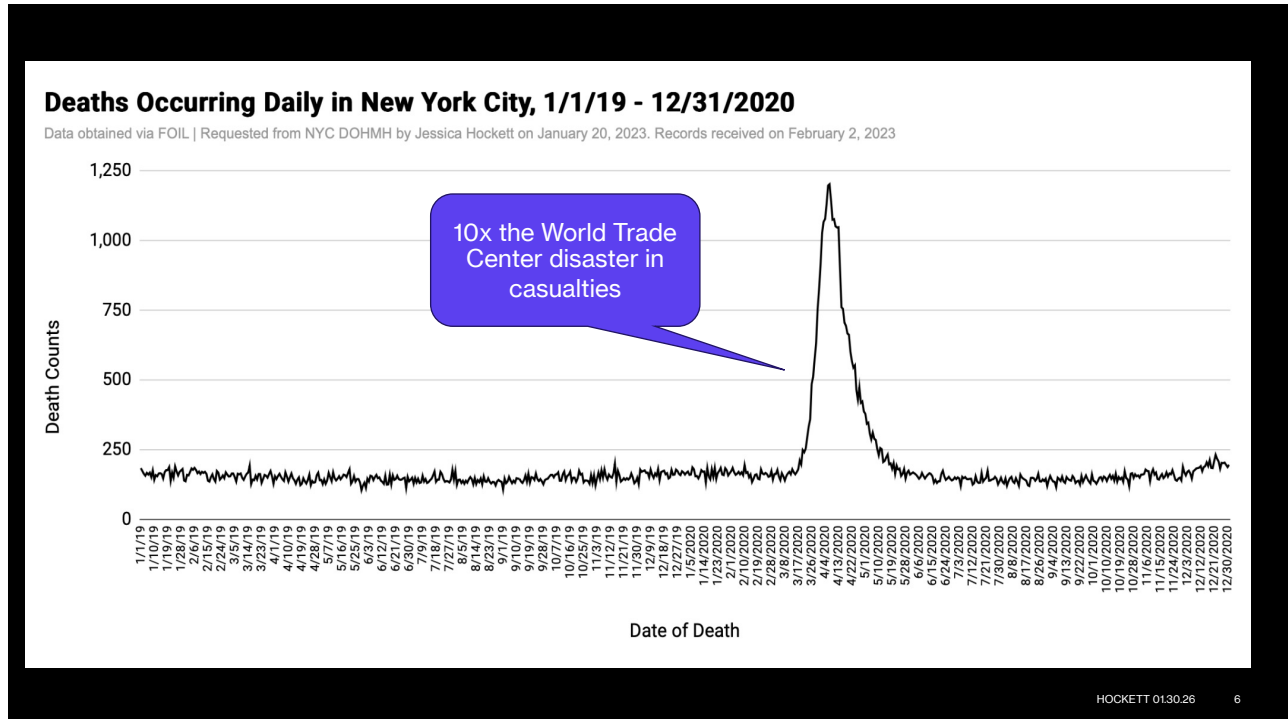
- **Data side:** Obtain, review and reconcile official mortality datasets (daily where available) and records obtained from city, state, and federal agencies through FOI requests.
- **Current Conclusion:** The NYC event curve and the 26K–27K excess-death estimate cannot be independently verified with available data. It is **unsubstantiated.**

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Today's Emphasis:

- Despite six years' worth of committees and millions of dollars, there is **no comprehensive or reliable data on the number of nursing home residents that died in 2020**, or any single week in 2020, regardless of cause or setting of death, for NY state, New York City, or U.S.
- The NY/NYC toll cannot be blamed solely or primarily on Gov Cuomo's nursing home policy, per official data

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Health Care

Local Officials Say a Nursing Home Dumped Residents to Die at Hospitals

The deaths of 18 residents of a New York nursing home highlight the continuing controversy over the Cuomo administration's decision not to count deaths in hospitals as nursing home deaths. The home denies the allegations.



The Grand Rehabilitation and Nursing at Barnwell, Columbia Memorial Hospital. Photo illustration: Lisa Larson-Walker/ProPublica. Source Images: Google StreetView

by Joe Sexton and Joaquin Sapien
August 11, 2020, 5:00 am

Sen Skoufis: "It's my opinion that your administration's definition truly misrepresents the scale of this crisis as a result. So let's try and get the full picture here and now: **How many of New York's nursing home residents died in hospitals?**"

Zucker insisted the state couldn't say because it **didn't yet have a fully accurate count.**

"You don't have a ballpark that you can give? So the total official number is about **6,500**. Are we talking with the hospital deaths: 8,000? 10,000? 15,000? What are we looking at?" Skoufis countered.

"I'm not prepared to give you a specific number. We are in the middle of a pandemic obviously, we always forget about that sometimes," Zucker said.

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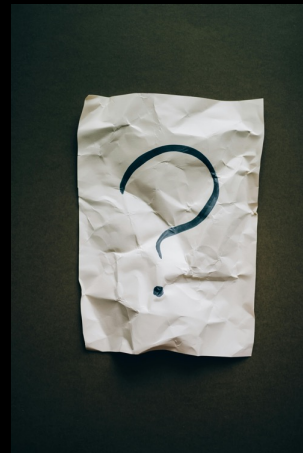
In the early weeks of the pandemic, the state had counted these deaths by attributing them to the nursing home regardless of where they physically occurred. But in April — as the death toll related to nursing homes mushroomed, hitting as many as 250 deaths a day — that changed: The administration of Gov. Andrew Cuomo decided not to count residents who died of COVID-19 in hospitals as nursing home deaths, saying it feared that their deaths would be double-counted if they were recorded that way.

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What's "Normal"?

- Most nursing home residents die in the nursing home facility (~75%-80%).
- 5-40% of transfers from nursing homes to hospitals are inappropriate or due more harm than good to the resident**



*Allers, K., Bausewein, C., Mehnert, A., & van den Block, L. (2019). Hospitalizations of nursing home residents at the end of life. *BMC Palliative Care*, 18, Article 90. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12904-019-0468-1> | Temkin-Greener, H., Zheng, N. T., Xing, J., & Mukamel, D. B. (2013). Site of death among nursing home residents in the United States: Changing patterns, 2003–2007. *Journal of the American Medical Directors Association*, 14(10), 741–748. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jamda.2013.06.006>

**Lemoyne, S. E., Herbots, H. H., De Blick, D., Remmen, R., Monsieurs, K. G., & Van Bogaert, P. (2019). "Appropriateness of transferring nursing home residents to emergency departments: A systematic review." *BMC Geriatrics*, 19, Article 17. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12877-019-1028-z>

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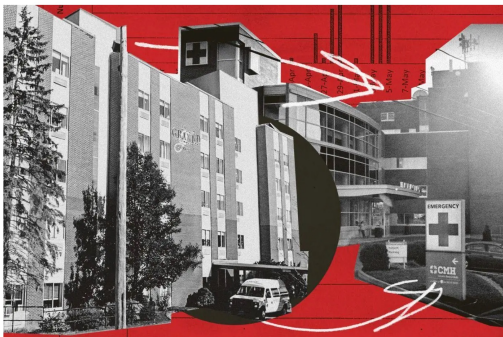
Residents with DNRs sent to hospitals for no good/apparent reason

- *[The nurse at Barnwell] didn't have detailed medical records for the patients, but she noted that all had arrived at the hospital with orders saying no extraordinary measures were to be taken to keep them alive. As a result, she and the Columbia County health director developed a theory: "For me," said Jack Mabb, the health director, "it appeared they were sending people to the hospital so they wouldn't die in the facility."*

Health Care

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Not mentioned

- CARES Act incentivized COVID hospitalizations and deaths
- Death "certificates" record actual place of death
- There is no state or federal source for nursing home/LTC resident deaths, regardless of place or cause of death.

CDC WONDER

- Federal warehouse for death record data
- Permits weekly, monthly, and yearly queries for place of death at the county level
- (Provisional “COVID” dashboard was launched in April 2020)

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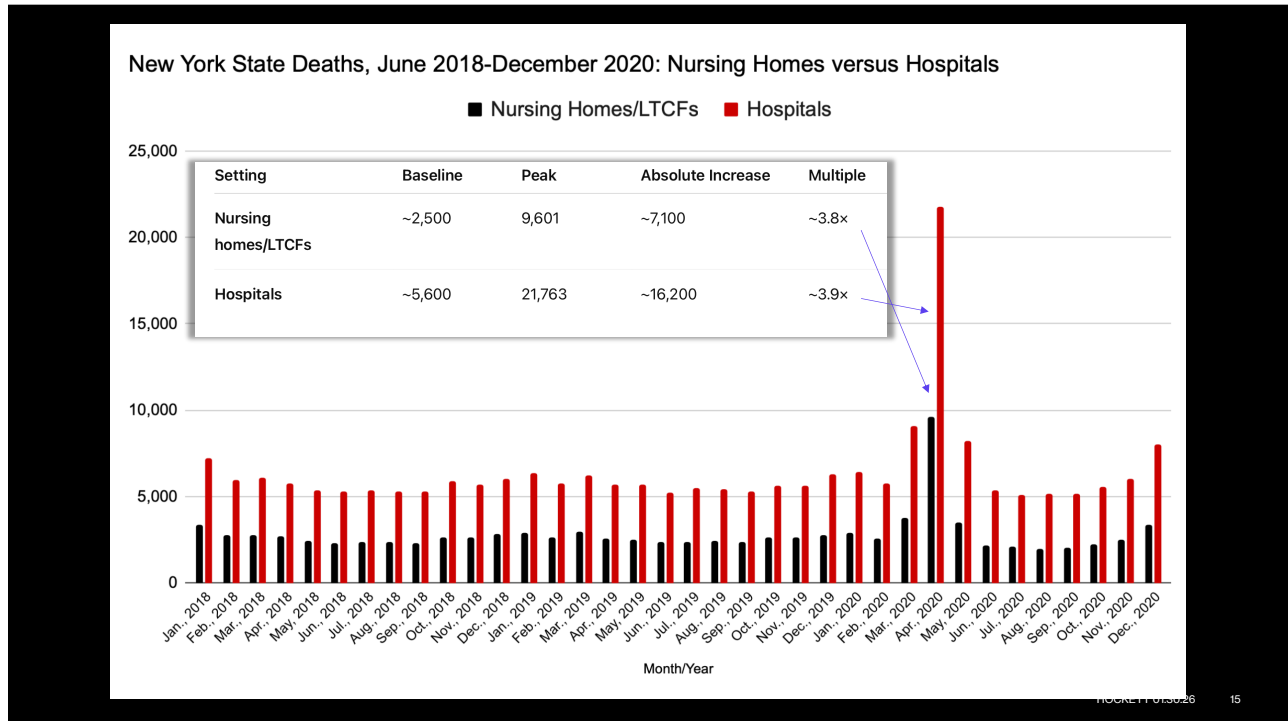
Place of Death (CDC WONDER)

- Medical Facility, inpatient
- Medical Facility, Outpatient/Emergency Department
- Medical Facility, Dead on Arrival
- Decedent’s Home
- Hospice Facility
- Nursing Home/LTC Facility
- Other

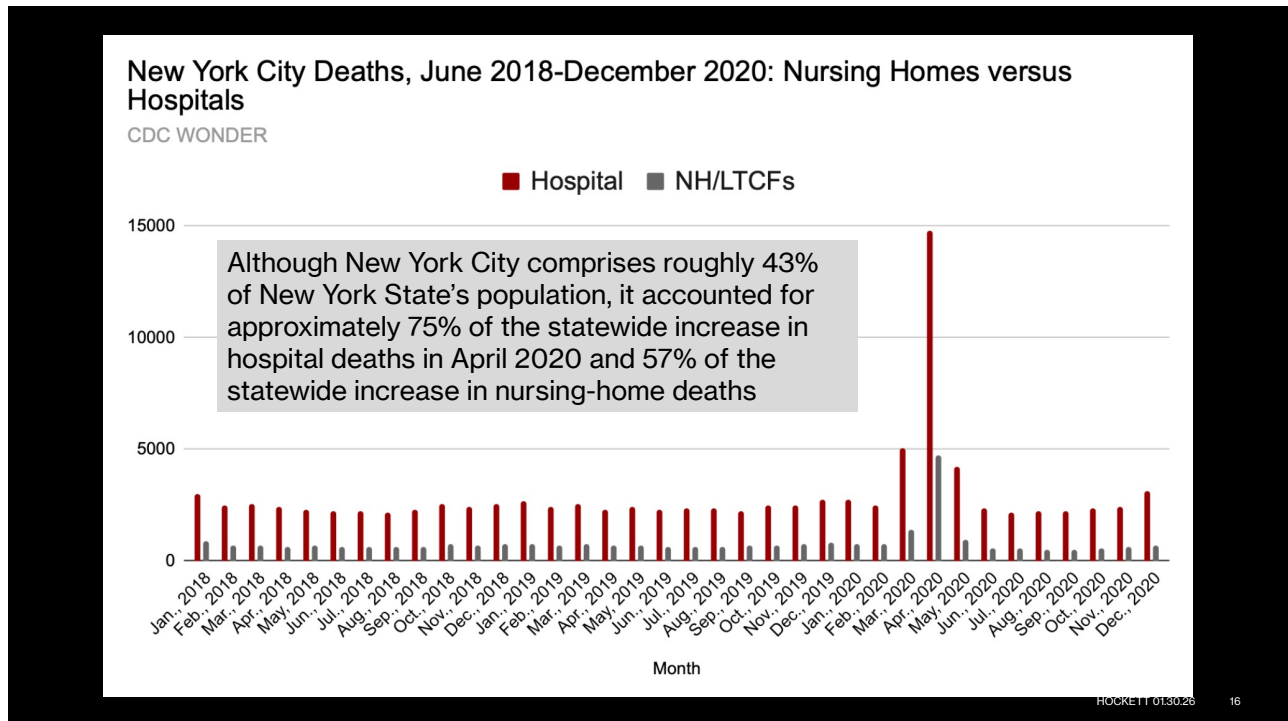
NY DOH and
NYC DOH
report these
same
categories

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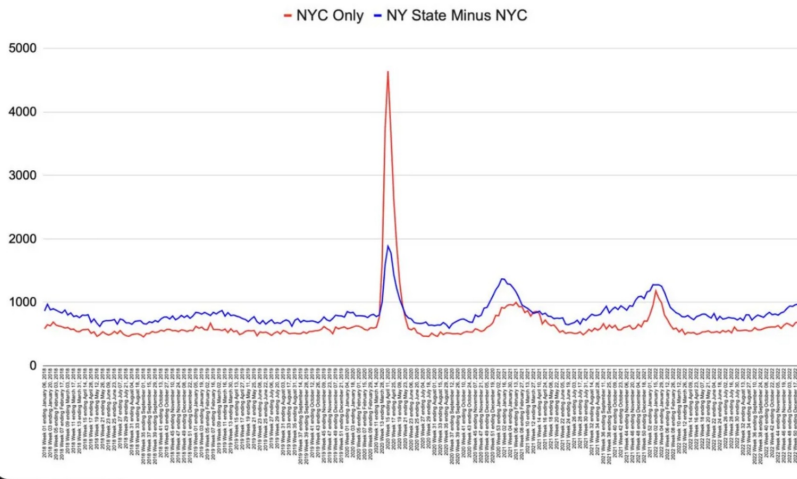


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Weekly All-Cause Deaths in Hospitals (Inpatient & ED), Jan 2018-Dec 2022, NYC vs NY State Minus NYC

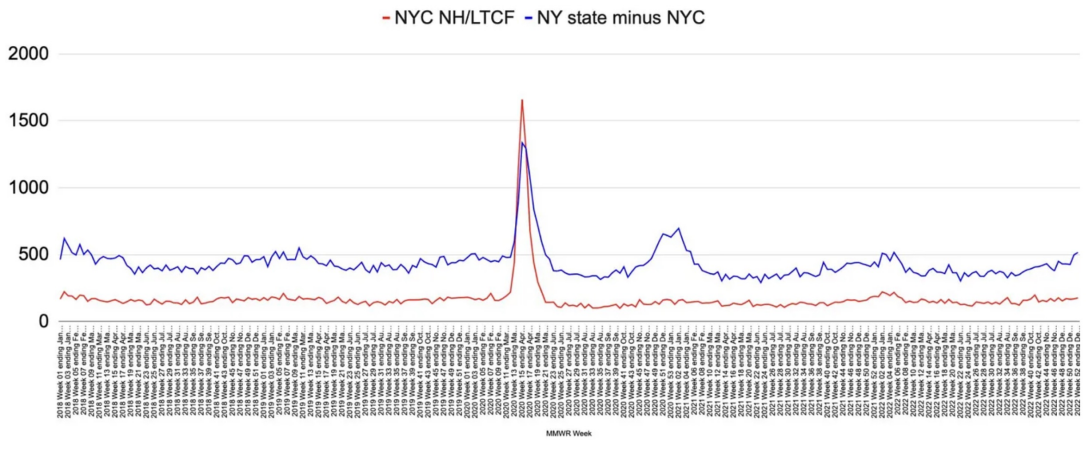


**Spring 2020:
More death in
hospitals in the
5 boroughs
than the sum
of every other
county in the
state.**

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What accounts for the late 2020/early 2021 differences in state vs city nursing homes?

Weekly Deaths (All Causes) in Nursing Homes/LTC Facilities: NYC vs NY state minus NYC



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Alarming increases in deaths in hospital, at home, *and* in nursing homes.

New York City, Weeks 12-22, 2020					
Place of Death	2019 Deaths from All Causes	2020 Deaths from All Causes	All Cause Increase/Decrease (2019/2020)	Percent Change from 2019	Percent of Total Increase/Decrease
Hospital Inpatient	4,837	19,827	14,990	310%	55.5%
Outpatient/Emergency Department	1,026	2,697	1,671	163%	6.2%
Nursing Home/LTC Facility	1,762	6,642	4,880	277%	18.1%
Hospice Facility	267	231	-36	-13%	-0.1%
Decedent's Home	2,906	8,215	5,309	183%	19.7%
Dead on Arrival (to Hospital)	122	139	17	14%	0.1%
Other	220	403	183	83%	0.7%
Totals	11,140	38,154	27,014	242%	100%

CDC WONDER

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Most deaths listing COVID-19 as underlying cause were in hospitals.

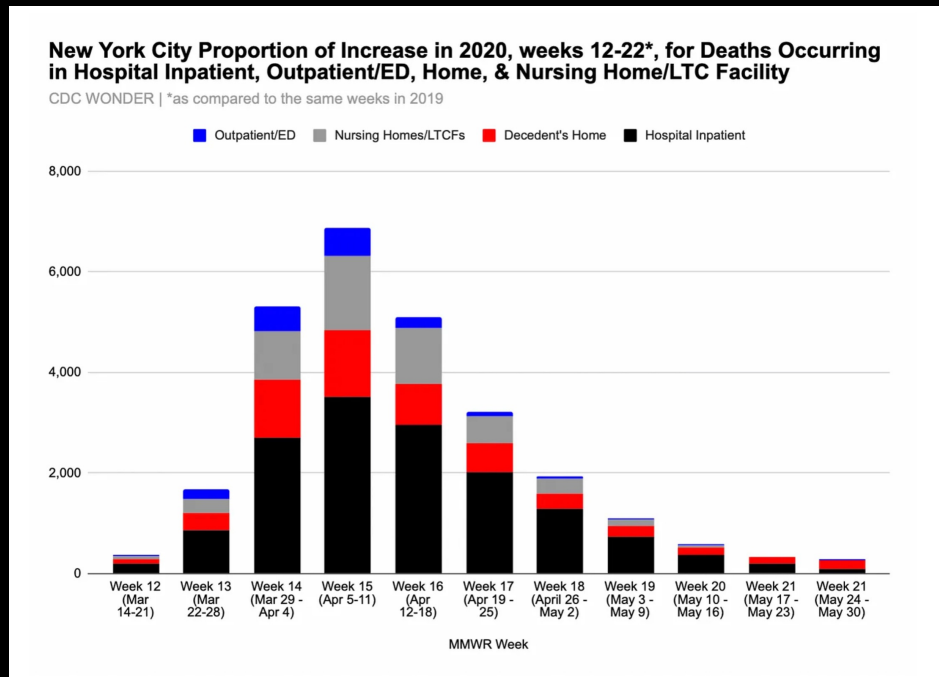
New York City, Weeks 12-22, 2020					
Place of Death	2019 Deaths from All Causes	2020 Deaths from All Causes	All Cause Increase/Decrease (2019/2020)	2020, Deaths Listing Covid as Underlying Cause	% of total Covid Deaths
Hospital Inpatient	4,837	19,827	14,990	14,704	76.1%
Outpatient/Emergency Department	1,026	2,697	1,671	1,271	6.6%
Nursing Home/LTC Facility	1,762	6,642	4,880	1,797	9.3%
Hospice Facility	267	231	-36	57	0.3%
Decedent's Home	2,906	8,215	5,309	1,426	7.4%
Dead on Arrival (to Hospital)	122	139	17	25	0.1%
Other	220	403	183	43	0.2%
Totals	11,140	38,154	27014	19,323	100.0%

CDC WONDER

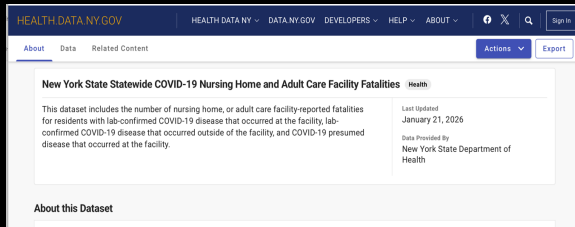
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Most of the increase was in hospitals, not in nursing homes.



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Daily COVID-19 survey through the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) Health Electronic Response Data System (HERDS).

Nursing homes and Adult Care Facilities required to complete daily. Began reporting in April 2020 for fatalities that occurred on or after March 1, 2020.

Prior fatalities are reflected in the earliest reporting week ending 4/21/2020 in the dataset (which obscured temporal patterns)

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What about non-COVID deaths? Hospital versus Personal Home versus Hospice Facility?

Orange County nursing home deaths

Period	Confirmed in facility	Presumed in facility	In facility (total)	Confirmed out of facility
April 2020	69	22	91	46
May 2020	31	2	33	25
Week ending June 2, 2020	2	0	2	4
TOTAL (periods above)	102 <i>Lab-confirmed COVID-19 death in NH facility</i>	24 <i>Suspected COVID-19</i>	126	75 <i>Lab-confirmed COVID-19 death outside of NH facility</i>

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What about non-COVID deaths? Hospital versus Personal Home versus Hospice Facility?

New York State nursing home deaths outside NYC

Period	Confirmed in facility	Presumed in facility	In facility (total)	Confirmed out of facility
April 2020	1,089	755	1,844	1,071
May 2020	906	126	1,032	590
Week ending June 2, 2020	96	6	102	80
TOTAL (all periods above)	2,091	887	2,978	1,741

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What about non-COVID deaths?

Hospital versus Personal Home versus Hospice Facility?

NYC nursing home deaths (Bronx, Kings, Queens, New York, Richmond)

Period	Confirmed in facility	Presumed in facility	In facility (total)	Confirmed out of facility
April 2020	941	1,739	2,680	1,590
May 2020	372	195	567	488
Week ending June 2, 2020	28	9	37	33
TOTAL (all periods above)	1,341	1,943	3,284	2,111

Only 10% of hospital toll. 

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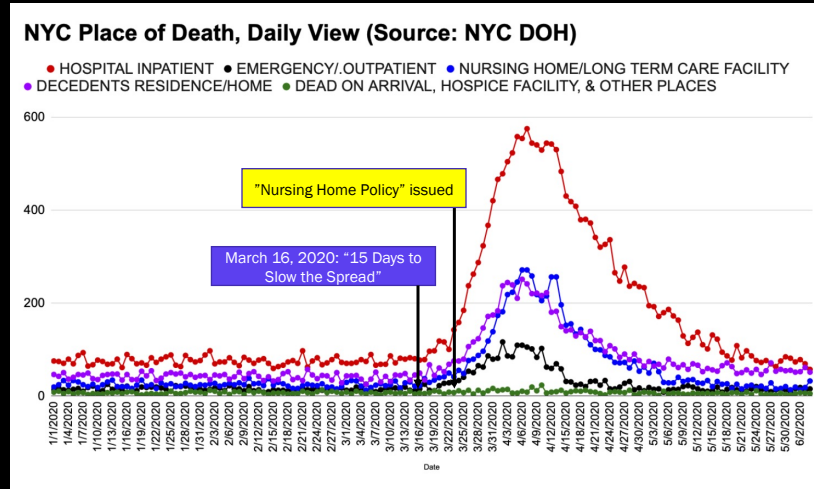
**Problems with
“discharging to
nursing homes
created
spread”:**

**Timing
Data gap
Testing realities**



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Daily view: near-synchronous rise in deaths by place/setting.



NYC all-cause mortality by place of death. Data obtained via FOIL. Requested from NYC DOHMH on 6/15/23 by Jessica Hockett. Records received on 7/26/23 | Values under 5 were censored and replaced with 3 in ED/Outpatient only

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AP: Over 9,000 virus patients sent into NY nursing homes

1 of 4 | FILE - In this Sunday, Oct. 18, 2020 file photo, families of COVID-19 victims who passed away in New York nursing homes gather in front of the Cobble Hill Death Center in the Brooklyn borough of New York to demand New York State Gov. Andrew Cuomo... Read More

BY BERNARD CONDON AND JENNIFER PELTZ
 Published 6:52 PM CDT, February 11, 2021

Transfer data divorced from time, place, or a sense of what's normal

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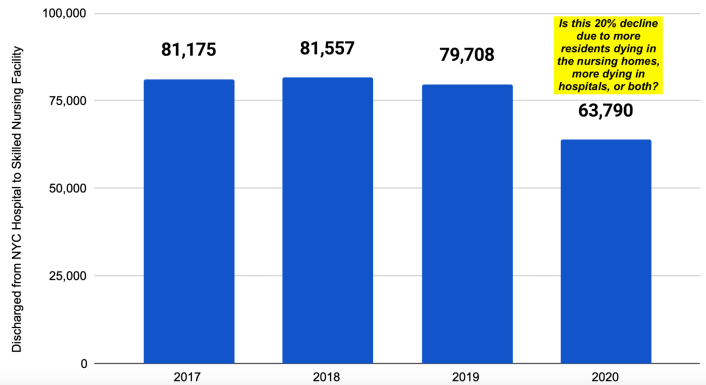
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Discharges from Hospitals to Skilled Nursing Facilities Went DOWN in 2020

Number of NYC Hospital Inpatients Discharged to Skilled Nursing Facilities

Time-series data (monthly, weekly, daily) not available to public

[New York] Statewide Planning and Research Cooperative System (SPARCS) | Jessica Hockett, PhD



- Decrease is the rough equivalent of the hospital inpatient excess
- Challenges the claim that sending COVID+ patients into nursing homes spread a deadly coronavirus
- Deaths that occurred in nursing homes can be explained by other sudden changes to standard of care

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About the tests...



- PCR testing is highly sensitive and may detect non-infectious viral material
- New York deployed a state-specific PCR test with unusually high reported positivity in NYC (60–70%+)
- PCR positivity can persist after active infection, particularly among older adults
- Positive tests triggered care protocols (e.g., isolation) that altered standard practice and carried known risks. Testing didn't lead to better treatment

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March 23, 2020 Executive Order 202.10 requires closer scrutiny



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EO 202.10

- Centralized hospital control under the Health Commissioner
- Suspended normal care, licensing, oversight, and documentation rules
- “Forced” rapid capacity expansion (50% - not achieved and inflated with field hospitals)
- Allowed emergency staffing with minimal qualification
- Permitted ambulances to operate outside their normal territories
- Shielded providers and institutions from liability
- Reduced transparency through recordkeeping waivers
- Allowed redesignation of hospice beds as inpatient beds
- Enabled state (and federal?) takeover of hospitals

Few to no third party witnesses

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The equivalent of every hospital inpatient died in the timeframe (yet hospitals weren't busy and field hospitals were barely used).

Deaths at New York City Medical Facilities, Total for Weeks 12-22, 2019 vs. 2020				
Borough of Occurance	2019 Deaths	2020 Deaths	Raw increase	% increase
Medical Facility: Inpatient	5,085	19,275	14,190	279%
Medical Facility: Outpatient/ED	1,006	2,648	1,642	163%
Medical Facility: Dead on Arrival	116	129	13	11%
Total	6,207	22,052	15,845	255%
CDC WONDER: Borough of Occurance				
<i>Inpatient, Outpatient/ED, Dead on Arrival</i>				

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What is needed (data)

- Complete hospital datasets with sufficient historical baselines
- County-level time-series data showing dates and places of death for nursing home and long-term care residents, regardless of cause
- Ambulance transfer and hospital discharge data documenting resident movement into and out of hospitals

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What is needed (verification)

- Independent substantiation of the New York City death curve and total mortality estimates
- Independent review or audit of hospital patient records

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Summary

- New York City's spring 2020 mortality figures were central to state, national, and international policy decisions
- Those figures continue to be cited as evidence of an unprecedented public-health emergency
- Key records needed to independently verify the timing, magnitude, and location of deaths have not been publicly released
- Establishing an accurate and verifiable historical record is essential for accountability and public trust

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