# Heart health in the UK plunges to highest crisis level in over 50 years



The current state of heart health in the UK has reached a concerning new low, with metrics indicating a steep decline at the start of the 2020s that surpasses any downturn experienced in over half a century. As reported by the British Heart Foundation (BHF), cardiovascular deaths among working-age adults have surged by 18% since 2019, rising from 18,693 to 21,975 by 2023. This alarming increase translates to an average of 420 deaths each week, highlighting a public health crisis that demands immediate attention.

The BHF's latest analysis reveals a series of worrying trends: nearly 785,000 individuals are now diagnosed with heart failure, a substantial rise from 650,000 in March 2020. The number of patients experiencing atrial fibrillation, an irregular heartbeat, has also reached a record high of 1.62 million, up from 1.48 million over the same period. Compounding these issues, the count of adults diagnosed with diabetes — a significant risk factor for cardiovascular disease — rose by 12%, bringing the total to 4.6 million.

These developments are exacerbated by rising obesity rates, affecting nearly every demographic in the nation. The situation has led to a stark increase in hospital waiting times, with 425,372 individuals waiting for planned heart procedures in England alone by March 2025, a steep rise from 232,082 at the decade's outset. Such waiting times are echoed in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, marking a nationwide crisis in accessing timely care.

The BHF attributes this decline in heart health to a myriad of factors, including an increasingly unhealthy population, widening health inequalities, and the lasting impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic itself has been cited as a significant contributor to a cardiovascular disease emergency, with reports indicating close to 100,000 excess deaths linked to heart-related issues since its onset. This equates to over 500 additional deaths weekly compared to expected numbers, as stated by health leaders.

In response to these grave statistics, the BHF has outlined a new strategy aimed at reversing these trends through investment in innovative areas such as artificial intelligence, data science, and genomics. Dr Charmaine Griffiths, the charity's chief executive, emphasised the necessity for evolutionary changes in how cardiovascular diseases are prevented and treated. The BHF's ambitious goals include a target to prevent 125,000 heart attacks and strokes by 2035, alongside a commitment to reduce early deaths from cardiovascular causes by 25%.

The Department of Health and Social Care has expressed its support for the BHF's strategy, citing ongoing efforts to address the root causes of poor heart health, including initiatives to combat smoking and obesity as part of a broader Plan for Change. With an emphasis on shifting care from sickness to preventive strategies, the department acknowledges the vital role of technology in enhancing community health and managing conditions to keep patients out of hospitals.

Experts assert that immediate action is crucial, with public health authorities and healthcare professionals calling for a concerted effort to confront the rising tide of cardiovascular diseases. Professor Bryan Williams, chief scientific and medical officer at the BHF, noted the imperative of leveraging research and innovation to stem this tide. "We need to act now to prevent the hard-won progress of recent decades being lost for future generations," he stated.

Amid rising concerns about heart health, the challenge remains not only to reverse a troubling trend but also to ensure that measures taken today can safeguard the health of future generations.

### Reference Map

* Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14724297/heart-health-declining-record-rate.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.bhf.org.uk/what-we-do/news-from-the-bhf/news-archive/2024/january/early-heart-disease-deaths-rise-to-14-year-high)
* Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14724297/heart-health-declining-record-rate.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/jun/22/health-bosses-warn-of-heart-disease-emergency-in-england), [[5]](https://www.bhf.org.uk/what-we-do/news-from-the-bhf/news-archive/2023/june/100000-excess-deaths-cardiovascular-disease)
* Paragraph 3: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14724297/heart-health-declining-record-rate.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[6]](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/mortality-profile-november-2024-update/mortality-profile-commentary-november-2024)
* Paragraph 4: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14724297/heart-health-declining-record-rate.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/jun/22/health-bosses-warn-of-heart-disease-emergency-in-england), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/jan/22/cardiovascular-disease-early-deaths-in-england-at-highest-rate-in-more-than-a-decade)
* Paragraph 5: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14724297/heart-health-declining-record-rate.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/jun/22/health-bosses-warn-of-heart-disease-emergency-in-england), [[5]](https://www.bhf.org.uk/what-we-do/news-from-the-bhf/news-archive/2023/june/100000-excess-deaths-cardiovascular-disease)
* Paragraph 6: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14724297/heart-health-declining-record-rate.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[7]](https://www.bhf.org.uk/what-we-do/news-from-the-bhf/news-archive/2024/september/action-could-avoid-11000-cvd-deaths-a-year-2035)
* Paragraph 7: [[2]](https://www.bhf.org.uk/what-we-do/news-from-the-bhf/news-archive/2024/january/early-heart-disease-deaths-rise-to-14-year-high), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/jan/22/cardiovascular-disease-early-deaths-in-england-at-highest-rate-in-more-than-a-decade)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14724297/heart-health-declining-record-rate.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bhf.org.uk/what-we-do/news-from-the-bhf/news-archive/2024/january/early-heart-disease-deaths-rise-to-14-year-high> - In January 2024, the British Heart Foundation (BHF) reported a significant increase in premature deaths from heart and circulatory diseases in England. In 2022, over 39,000 individuals under 75 died from these conditions, marking the highest annual total since 2008. This reversal in the declining trend of premature deaths is attributed to factors such as an increasingly unhealthy population, widening health inequalities, and pressures on the NHS, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The BHF emphasizes the need for urgent action to address these challenges.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/jun/22/health-bosses-warn-of-heart-disease-emergency-in-england> - In June 2023, health leaders in England highlighted a cardiovascular disease emergency, citing nearly 100,000 excess deaths since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Analysis by the British Heart Foundation revealed that over 500 additional people per week have died from heart disease, heart attacks, or strokes compared to expected levels. Factors contributing to this surge include the direct impact of COVID-19 and ongoing disruptions to NHS heart services, underscoring the urgent need for enhanced heart care.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/jan/22/cardiovascular-disease-early-deaths-in-england-at-highest-rate-in-more-than-a-decade> - In January 2024, The Guardian reported that premature deaths from cardiovascular disease in England reached their highest rate in over a decade. Data from the British Heart Foundation indicated that the rate of deaths among individuals under 75 had been declining before the pandemic but began to rise in 2020. This upward trend continued, with the rate reaching 80 per 100,000 people in 2022, the highest since 2011. The article highlights the urgent need for improved heart care and preventive measures.
5. <https://www.bhf.org.uk/what-we-do/news-from-the-bhf/news-archive/2023/june/100000-excess-deaths-cardiovascular-disease> - In June 2023, the British Heart Foundation reported nearly 100,000 excess deaths involving cardiovascular disease in England since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. This equates to over 500 additional deaths per week compared to expected levels. The BHF attributes this alarming trend to factors such as the direct impact of COVID-19 on heart health and significant disruptions to NHS heart care services, emphasizing the need for urgent government intervention to address the crisis.
6. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/mortality-profile-november-2024-update/mortality-profile-commentary-november-2024> - The UK Government's November 2024 update on mortality profiles revealed a significant increase in cardiovascular disease mortality rates. Between 2019 and 2022, there was an upward trend in cardiovascular disease mortality, with the 2023 rate remaining significantly higher than in 2019. This indicates a reversal of previous declines and underscores the need for continued efforts to address heart health challenges in the UK.
7. <https://www.bhf.org.uk/what-we-do/news-from-the-bhf/news-archive/2024/september/action-could-avoid-11000-cvd-deaths-a-year-2035> - In September 2024, the British Heart Foundation highlighted that up to 11,000 early deaths from heart and circulatory diseases in England could be avoided annually by 2035 with a comprehensive heart disease action plan. The BHF called for measures such as reducing treatment waiting times, addressing obesity and smoking, tackling health inequalities, and promoting research and innovation to reverse the current upward trend in cardiovascular disease mortality.