



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on April 15, 2020

NYU Study: After Age, Obesity Most Important Risk Factor for COVID-19 Patients

A study conducted by researchers at the at the New York University (NYU) Grossman School of Medicine — which evaluated the electronic patient records of 4,103 individuals who tested positive for COVID-19 in the New York City healthcare system between March 1 and April 2 — found that obesity, along with age, was the biggest deciding factor in hospital admissions.

Half of the patients whose records were studied were admitted to a hospital. The researchers found is that “in the decision tree for admission, the most important features were age >65 and obesity.”



“The chronic condition with the strongest association with critical illness was obesity, with a substantially higher odds ratio than any cardiovascular or pulmonary disease,” writes the study’s lead author, Christopher M. Petrilli, MD, an Assistant Professor at the Grossman School of Medicine.

Age still functions as the biggest overall single risk factor. “Age is far and away the strongest risk factor for hospitalization, dwarfing the importance of obesity,” Leora Horwitz, a co-author of the study, told the business technology news website ZDNet in an e-mail. “Obesity is the most important of the chronic conditions when considering all such conditions simultaneously.”

While age was by far the biggest risk factor for hospitalizations and critical care, obesity, heart failure, and chronic kidney disease were all linked to more severe coronavirus cases.

“The risk factors we identified for hospitalization in COVID-19 are largely similar to those associated with any type of severe disease requiring hospitalization or ICU level care,” the researchers wrote.

Researchers found that 87 percent of patients who were over 65 were admitted to the hospital, and 70 percent of those who were obese and over age 35 were admitted. Even those under 35 were very likely to be admitted if they were male and obese.

Obesity, in this case, was determined by an individual’s body mass index (BMI), which is figured by comparing a person’s weight to his height. A body mass index of 30 and higher is considered obese.

Since this writer has several factors that put him at risk for being susceptible to the coronavirus — including being over 65, having diabetes, and having had heart surgery — he quickly looked for an online BMI calculator to see if he at least escaped the obesity factor. With a BMI of 25.7, he avoided the obesity category but was still slightly at risk, according to the World Obesity Federation. Said the federation: “Given the extremely high rates of obesity around the globe we expect that a high percentage of the population who will contract coronavirus will also have a BMI over 25.”

Although the above-named study was conducted in New York, similar conclusions have been reached elsewhere. An April 8 Reuters report quoted France’s chief epidemiologist, Professor Jean-François



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Delfraissy, who heads the scientific council that advises the French government on the COVID-19 pandemic.

“This virus is terrible, it can hit young people, in particular obese young people. Those who are overweight really need to be careful,” Delfraissy told franceinfo radio.

“That is why we’re worried about our friends in America, where the problem of obesity is well known and where they will probably have the most problems because of obesity.”



Image: Motortion/iStock/Getty Images Plus

Warren Mass has served The New American since its launch in 1985 in several capacities, including marketing, editing, and writing. Since retiring from the staff several years ago, he has been a regular contributor to the magazine. Warren writes from Texas and can be reached at wmass@thenewamerican.com.

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