

# Everybody's Favourite COVID Jester Makes a Big Math Blunder

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Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Science and Medicine](#)

In his recent [skit](#), comedian **JP Sears** makes a big math blunder regarding the COVID death count. One I've made before.

Imitating a spokesperson of unclear affiliation, with tape on his glasses and a psychedelic T-shirt, JP starts off by poking fun at bizarre masking etiquette: "So I should put the mask on while I walk from here to podium and then take it off?"

Once at the mic, JP says: "We have updated numbers on the infection-fatality rate for COVID-19 directly from the CDC." He then references the CDC's most recent [infection-fatality estimates](#), claiming that it says only 0.054% of people over 70 (who are infected with SARS-COV-2) are dying.

My immediate reaction was: "Whoa! That's too low. Has the CDC gone from over-exaggerating the deaths to under-exaggerating?"

The commonly accepted fatality rate for the flu (among the general population) is 0.1%. Seniors should be higher than that, not lower. Looking at the source document, I saw JP's error — he's talking in percentages but CDC's table clearly indicates ratios:

| Parameter                 | Scenario 1   | Scenario 2 | Scenario 3  | Scenario 4 | Scenario 5:<br>Current Best Estimate   |
|---------------------------|--|------------|---|------------|--|
| $R_0^*$                   | 2.0  |            | 4.0   |            | 2.5  |
| Infection Fatality Ratio† | 0-19 years: 0.00002<br>20-49 years: 0.00007<br>50-69 years: 0.0025<br>70+ years: 0.028 |            | 0-19 years: 0.0001<br>20-49 years: 0.0003<br>50-69 years: 0.010<br>70+ years: 0.093 |            | 0-19 years:<br>0.00003<br>20-49 years:<br>0.0002<br>50-69 years:<br>0.005<br>70+ years:<br>0.054 |

I made this same mistake in an article I wrote two months ago, where I calculated the infection-fatality rate in Canada. It was thanks to an email from [Dr. Ron Brown PhD](#) that I was able to spot and remove the error. As Brown said: "That decimal point is a killer! Just remember to move the decimal over TWO places to the RIGHT to convert [a ratio] to a

percentage. (And TWO places to the LEFT to convert a percentage to a [ratio].)”

Here’s how I would explain the difference between a ratio and a percentage, using the above CDC estimate for those over 70:

A ratio is dealing with only just one infected person. For every ONE person infected with SAR-COV-2 the CDC is estimating that 0.054 will be having an permanent out-of-body experience.

But a percentage is showing how many will die out of ONE-HUNDRED infected (*cent* being Latin for one hundred). In order to arrive at a percentage from the ratio, the ratio needs to be multiplied by 100. Therefore, if 100 are infected that would mean 5.4 are doomed to die. 5.4%.

Yesterday, I sent an email to [Prof. Denis Rancourt PhD](#) to confirm whether or not I had indeed spotted an error. His to-the-point reply: “Yes, JP f\*cked up. He took the CDC ratios to be percentages.”

Like I said, I did the same mistake a month or so ago. I would ask that JP Sears do what I did: Remove the error. In this case, delete the video. Make a new one. Even if you go with the higher percentages, a 5.6% fatality rate for seniors over 70 doesn’t justify destroying a nation. A 2003 study in [Clinical Infectious Disease](#), for example, cites flu fatality rates as high as 25% for elderly people in nursing homes — and an average of 8%.

JP’s a skilled comedian. He can make an even funnier video without having to falsify what the CDC says. Just like his [clever janitorial skit](#) or his brilliant [video about staying healthy in 2020](#). His satirical work is invaluable for helping change the not-so-funny direction the world is headed.

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