

Below is a scientifically grounded, brutally realistic, and fully in-universe explanation of how infected individuals would actually live, decline, and ultimately die in The Last Adults world. It uses the biology described in the NRV-2027 paper, the behavioral regression observed in both versions of the novel, and the harsh real-world consequences of a planet full of adult bodies with toddler minds.

It is grim.

Necessary.

And completely consistent with the science of your story.

THE LAST ADULTS – The Life and Death of the Infected

1. The Initial Regression Window (0–72 Hours After Infection)

Once exposed to NRV-2027, the decline is fast:

Executive function collapses within 8–12 hours.

Speech fragments within 24 hours.

All goal-directed behavior disappears by 48 hours.

Toilet use, eating hygiene, and basic self-care vanish by 72 hours.

The infected retain:

mobility

curiosity

emotional expression

simple play behaviors

But lose:

planning

sanitation

danger perception

hunger recognition beyond impulse

ability to seek resources intentionally

They become biologically adult bodies with toddler cognition — and no caregiver.

This combination is fatal.

2. The Accumulating Hazards (Day 3–Day 14)

A. Dehydration

Most infected individuals lose the ability to:

locate clean water

operate faucets

drink from cups

avoid contaminated sources

They drink from puddles, toilets, gutters, or not at all.

Average time to death from dehydration in temperate climates: 3–7 days.

Those who find water may last longer, but most do not.

B. Starvation

Regression wipes out:

food preparation

tool use

remembering where food is stored

ability to open packaged items

Most infected will:

grab food with bare hands

drop it

play with it

wander away

eat non-food objects

Fatal malnutrition sets in by: 10–20 days.

C. Falls and Basic Injury

With no danger awareness:

they fall down stairs

walk into traffic

climb unstable objects

touch hot stoves

wander into unsafe industrial areas

Mortality from injury rises sharply within the first week.

3. Breakdown of Sanitation (Day 3–Day 30)

This is where the collapse becomes catastrophic.

A planet full of humans who no longer:

use toilets

wash hands

avoid feces

clean wounds

maintain personal hygiene

avoid spoiled food

...quickly becomes a world full of bacterial supergrowth.

A. Gastrointestinal infections

Without sanitation, most infected contract:

E. coli

shigella

salmonella

campylobacter

rotavirus

norovirus

Severe diarrhea leads to fatal dehydration within: 48–96 hours.

B. Skin and wound infections

Scratches, cuts, and bites become:

cellulitis

sepsis

necrotic infections

staph and MRSA outbreaks

Toddlers in adult bodies often:

pick at wounds

smear dirt on them

reopen scabs

spread bacteria unintentionally

Sepsis becomes the primary cause of death in: Days 7–21.

C. Respiratory infections

Fecal contamination + crowded indoor spaces creates:

aspiration pneumonia

bacterial pneumonia

aerosolized fecal dust inhalation

Without antibiotics, mortality is near 100%.

4. Environmental Collapse (Weeks 2–6)

A. Power Failure

After the grid fails, water stops flowing.

Toilets stop flushing.

Refrigeration ends.

Food spoils.

Sewage backs up.

The infected congregate around familiar environments:

bathrooms

kitchens

playgrounds

hallways

offices

These become disease chambers.

B. Temperature Extremes

Without HVAC:

heatwaves cause hyperthermia

cold snaps cause hypothermia

Toddlers cannot regulate clothing behavior.

5. Final Mortality Curve (Weeks 4–12)

Scientific modeling suggests:

90–95% of the infected population die within 4–8 weeks

The remaining 5–10% linger for 8–12 weeks, but only in rare environments where:

water is accessible

food is naturally available

climate is mild

danger is minimal

infection exposure is limited

These final survivors resemble feral, confused, wandering groups — no longer dangerous, simply lost.

6. The “Last Wave” of Deaths (Month 3)

The individuals who survive longest are typically:

near water sources

in temperate climates

physically strong adults

mildly infected who retain some motor habits

in institutional settings (hospitals, senior living facilities) where food or water is initially abundant

Even they eventually succumb to:

dehydration

hypoglycemia

bacterial infection

exposure

accidental injury

starvation

No human can survive infancy without caregivers.

Regression makes every human a solitary, unsupervised toddler.

The outcome is inevitable.

7. The Grim Reality of the Last Adults Universe

This is not a sudden apocalypse of explosions or violence.

It is the quiet end of cognition — followed by the biological consequences.

Humanity doesn't die in battle.

It dies of:

thirst

infection

exposure

disorientation

falls

untreated wounds

contaminated water

This is why the world becomes silent so quickly.

Not because people vanish, but because their bodies collapse and the environment finishes what the virus began.

The world becomes a nursery — and then a graveyard.

more follow-up stuff:

- ✓ Jim Keening's in-universe scientific analysis of the mortality curve
- ✓ How the toddlers Jim encounters are still alive weeks later
- ✓ A visual or Sora-ready narration depicting the decline of cities
- ✓ A chapter describing Jim's discovery of mass die-offs
- ✓ A CDC report reconstruction: "Projected Mortality in NRV-2027 Outbreak"