

COVID-19 Was Third Leading Cause of Death in U.S.

CDC reports examine U.S. Death Rates for 2021

Two reports released in today's MMWR use CDC's National Vital Statistics System to look at death rates in the United States and find that differences in death rates still remain between certain racial and ethnic minority groups.

The first report provides an overview of provisional U.S. mortality data for 2021, including a comparison of death rates for all causes of death and for deaths involving COVID-19. The study found that the overall age-adjusted death rate increased by almost 1% in 2021 from 2020. Overall death rates were highest among non-Hispanic American Indian/Alaskan Native and non-Hispanic Black or African American people. For the second year, COVID-19 was the third leading cause of death after heart disease and cancer.

The second report shows that from 2020 to 2021, differences in COVID-19 death rates decreased among most racial and ethnic groups. This report found disparities in the age-adjusted COVID-19 death rates decreased by 14%–40% for most racial and ethnic groups, including non-Hispanic White people, who accounted for 60%–65% of all people who died; and increased non-significantly (7.2%) for non-Hispanic Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander persons (0.2%–0.3% of people who died) compared with non-Hispanic multiracial people.

The results of both studies highlight the need for greater effort to implement effective interventions. We must work to ensure equal treatment in all communities in proportion to their need for effective interventions that can prevent excess COVID-19 deaths.