

Since delta arrived, COVID deaths have mostly happened in less-vaccinated Greater Minnesota
The 7-county metro, where vaccination rates and mitigation efforts are higher, has seen a lower proportion of deaths since June

The onset of COVID-19 pandemic in spring 2020 was notable for the number of deaths happening in more densely-populated areas, with New York one of the worst-hit cities in the first few months of the virus' arrival.

But the introduction of vaccines has subsequently marked a shift nationwide, with deaths increasingly coming from more rural areas where there is greater skepticism of the vaccines, and where COVID mitigation measures like mask wearing and social distancing are less likely to be observed

That shift can be seen in Minnesota since the onset of the highly contagious delta COVID variant, which has caused cases to surge since it became the dominant strain of the virus over the summer.

The 7-county Twin Cities metro (Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, Washington) accounts for 55% of the state's population, but in the most recent COVID surge has been seeing proportionally fewer cases compared to the counties in Greater Minnesota. While there are a confluence of factors that determine an area's death rate, one of the crucial ones is vaccination rate.

The 7-county metro has some of the highest vaccination rates in all of Minnesota, with all seven counties now having a vaccination rate of 70% or higher among those aged 12 and over.

Although breakthrough infections still happen even when you're vaccinated, the vaccines are extremely effective at preventing hospitalizations and death from COVID-19, and that now seems to be borne out by recent death figures in Minnesota.

Up until June 3, there had been 7,437 deaths from COVID-19 in Minnesota, of which 54.1% (4,028 deaths) happened in the 7-county metro and the rest happened outside of it – pretty close to a proportional split based on population.

Since June 3, as delta started its spread across Minnesota – eventually becoming the dominant strain in July – Minnesota has reported 1,531 COVID-19 deaths. Of those, 628 have come from the 7-county metro and 903 from Greater Minnesota.

That means that just 41% of COVID deaths reported in the past five-and-a-bit months have happened in the metro, while Greater Minnesota has experienced a number of deaths significantly disproportionate to their population.

If you dig into the figures some more, there are some notable disparities between counties with differing vaccination rates.

Olmsted County, which has a population of more than 158,000 and now has a vaccination rate of 88.5% in those aged 12+, has registered 21 deaths from COVID-19 since June 3.

Otter Tail County, which has a little over 58,000 people and a current vaccination rate of 62.5% in those aged 12+, has registered 34 deaths during the same period.

The most dramatic increase was seen in Faribault County, a county of just under 14,000 residents, which prior to June 3 had registered 10 COVID deaths, but has since registered 21 more.

Other counties with similarly high death rates for their populations include Itasca County (45K pop. 30 deaths since June 3), Rice County (66K pop. 28 deaths since June 3), Beltrami County (47K pop., 27 deaths since June 3), [Pine County](#) (29K pop., 16 deaths since June 3), and McLeod County (30K pop. 20 deaths since June 3).

Just outside the 7-county metro but still mostly within the Twin Cities metropolitan area is Wright County, which has registered 48 deaths during that time from a population of 149,000, almost as many as in Washington County (52 from 262,000 population).

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