

DEATH HIGHLIGHTS

A total of 14,894 deaths occurred among Nebraska residents in 2006, a decrease from the 14,950 deaths that occurred in 2005. The 2006 figure translates into a crude mortality rate of 8.4 deaths per 1,000 residents and an age-adjusted mortality rate of 735.0 deaths per 100,000 residents.

The average age at death among Nebraska residents in 2006 was 75.1 years, a slight drop from last year's figure of 75.2 years. The state's all-time record is 75.5 years, which was set in 2003. By gender, the average age at death in 2006 was 78.8 years for Nebraska women, which represents an increase from the 2005 mark of 78.6 years and is now the state's all-time record, and 71.1 years for Nebraska men, which represents a decrease from the 2005 figure of 71.6 years.

Nebraska's leading cause of death in 2006 was heart disease, which accounted for 3,444 resident deaths. This figure represents just under one-fourth (23.1%) of all deaths that occurred among Nebraska residents in 2006. Heart disease has been the most frequent cause of death both statewide and nationally for several decades, although its toll has steadily declined during the past 30 years. In Nebraska, 2006 marked the fourth consecutive year in which fewer than 4,000 heart disease deaths were recorded, and since the beginning of this decade, the state's heart disease mortality rate has dropped by nearly 18%.

With just 18 fewer deaths than heart disease, cancer was the second leading cause of death among Nebraska residents in 2006, and was responsible for 3,426 deaths. As a result of declining heart disease mortality, the gap between the number of cancer and heart disease deaths in Nebraska has narrowed markedly in recent years, and could put cancer ahead of heart disease as the state's leading cause of death within the next few years. In fact, among Nebraska men, this historic shift occurred for the first time in 2006, with 1,839 deaths attributed to cancer compared to 1,625 for heart disease.

Cancer of the lung was the year's leading cause of cancer deaths among both Nebraska men and women, accounting for 903 deaths (538 men, 365 women). Colorectal (colon and rectum) cancer was Nebraska's second leading cause of cancer deaths overall in 2006, with 381 deaths (202 men, 179 women). However, breast cancer was the second leading cause of cancer deaths among Nebraska women in 2006, claiming 213 lives, which is the state's lowest annual number of female breast cancer deaths since 1967. After lung and colorectal cancer, prostate cancer was the #3 cause of cancer deaths among Nebraska men, claiming 183 lives in 2006. Taken together, these four sites were responsible for almost half (49.1%) of the state's cancer deaths in 2006.

Although still #2 overall, cancer ranks well ahead of heart disease as the leading cause of death at younger ages. Among Nebraska residents between 45 and 74 years of age, 1,625 deaths were attributed to cancer in 2006, compared to 854 for heart disease, which was the next most frequent cause of death. At age 75 and beyond, however, heart disease easily outpaced cancer as the state's leading cause of death in 2006, by a count of 2,502 to 1,705.

DEATH HIGHLIGHTS (continued)

After heart disease and cancer, no other single cause of death accounted for more than 10% of Nebraska resident deaths in 2006. Cerebrovascular disease (usually referred to as stroke), long the state's third leading cause of death, held that position again in 2006, and was responsible for 921 deaths. Chronic lung disease was Nebraska's fourth leading cause of death in 2006, accounting for 784 deaths.

Accidents (also referred to as unintentional injuries) were Nebraska's fifth leading cause of death in 2006, claiming 685 lives. Motor vehicle accidents were once again Nebraska's leading cause of accidental deaths, accounting for 270 fatalities. Falls were the #2 cause of accidental deaths, with 170 resident fatalities in 2006. Seventeen of the state's accidental deaths in 2006 were farm-related. Accidents were the leading cause of death in 2006 among Nebraska residents under the age of 45 years (excluding infants under one year of age), accounting for 254 (30.9%) of 821 deaths.

Alzheimer's Disease has now ranked among the top ten causes of death in Nebraska for over a decade, and in 2006 it was again the state's sixth leading cause of death. The number of Nebraska deaths attributed to Alzheimer's Disease in 2006 (499) was an all-time record, surpassing the previous record of 473, set in 2005. After Alzheimer's Disease, Nebraska's top ten causes of death in 2006 included diabetes (with 437 deaths), pneumonia (331 deaths), nephritis and nephrosis (244 deaths), and suicide (201 deaths).

A total of 148 infant deaths occurred among Nebraska residents in 2006, which translates into an infant mortality rate of 5.5 per 1,000 live births. This figure represents a slight improvement from the 2005 rate of 5.6, and nearly equals the state's all-time lowest infant mortality rate of 5.4, which occurred in 2003. The leading cause of infant deaths in Nebraska in 2006 was birth defects, which accounted for 45 deaths, followed by sudden infant death syndrome (also known as SIDS), which resulted in 18 deaths. Low birth weight babies accounted for 95 (64.2%) of Nebraska's infant deaths, with 73 of these children falling into the very low birth weight (<1500 grams) category. Neonates (infants less than 28 days old) accounted for the majority of Nebraska's 2006 infant deaths, with a count of 93, while post-neonates (infants between 28 days and one year of age) accounted for the remaining 55.