

DEATH HIGHLIGHTS

A total of 15,256 deaths occurred among Nebraska residents in 2007, an increase from the 14,894 deaths that occurred in 2006. The 2007 figure translates into a crude mortality rate of 8.6 deaths per 1,000 residents and an age-adjusted mortality rate of 743.4 deaths per 100,000 residents.

The average age at death among Nebraska residents in 2007 was 75.2 years, a slight increase from last year's figure of 75.1 years. The state's all-time record is 75.5 years, which was set in 2003. By gender, the average age at death in 2007 was 78.7 years for Nebraska women, a slight drop from the 2006 figure of 78.8 years, and 71.3 years for Nebraska men, which represents an increase from the 2006 figure of 71.1 years.

Nebraska's leading cause of death in 2007 was heart disease, which accounted for 3,517 resident deaths. This figure represents just under one-fourth (23.1%) of all deaths that occurred among Nebraska residents in 2007. 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, 2007 marked the fifth 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 over 20%.

With just 40 fewer deaths than heart disease, cancer was the second leading cause of death among Nebraska residents in 2007, and was responsible for 3,477 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 and again in 2007, with 1,800 deaths attributed to cancer compared to 1,702 for heart disease.

Cancer of the lung was the year's leading cause of cancer deaths among both Nebraska men and women, accounting for 939 deaths (545 men, 394 women). Colorectal (colon and rectum) cancer was Nebraska's second leading cause of cancer deaths overall in 2007, with 369 deaths (172 men, 197 women). However, breast cancer was the second leading cause of cancer deaths among Nebraska women in 2007, claiming 232 lives, and prostate cancer was the #2 cause of cancer deaths among Nebraska men, claiming 197 lives in 2007. Taken together, these four sites were responsible for 50% of the state's cancer deaths in 2007.

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, 1,637 deaths were attributed to cancer in 2007, compared to 863 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 2007, by a count of 2,569 to 1,743.

DEATH HIGHLIGHTS (continued)

After heart disease and cancer, no other single cause of death accounted for more than 10% of Nebraska resident deaths in 2007. Cerebrovascular disease (usually referred to as stroke), long the state's third leading cause of death, held that position again in 2007, and was responsible for 920 deaths. Chronic lung disease was Nebraska's fourth leading cause of death in 2007, accounting for 810 deaths.

Accidents (also referred to as unintentional injuries) were Nebraska's fifth leading cause of death in 2007, claiming 674 lives. Motor vehicle accidents were once again Nebraska's leading cause of accidental deaths, accounting for 284 fatalities. Falls were the #2 cause of accidental deaths, with 161 resident fatalities in 2007. Fifteen of the state's accidental deaths in 2007 were farm-related. Accidents were the leading cause of death in 2007 among Nebraska residents under the age of 45 years (excluding infants under one year of age), accounting for 257 (31.2%) of 825 deaths.

Alzheimer's Disease has now ranked among the top ten causes of death in Nebraska for over a decade, and in 2007 it was again the state's sixth leading cause of death. The number of Nebraska deaths attributed to Alzheimer's Disease in 2007 (512) was an all-time record, surpassing the previous record of 499, set in 2006. After Alzheimer's Disease, Nebraska's top ten causes of death in 2007 included diabetes (with 472 deaths), pneumonia (329 deaths), nephritis and nephrosis (269 deaths), and essential hypertension and hypertensive renal disease (186 deaths).

A total of 183 infant deaths occurred among Nebraska residents in 2007, which translates into an infant mortality rate of 6.8 per 1,000 live births. This figure represents an increase from the 2006 rate of 5.5, and is the highest infant mortality rate recorded in Nebraska since 2001. The leading cause of infant deaths in Nebraska in 2007 was birth defects, which accounted for 39 deaths. Low birth weight babies accounted for 127 (69.4%) of Nebraska's infant deaths, with 102 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 2007 infant deaths, with a count of 132, while post-neonates (infants between 28 days and one year of age) accounted for the remaining 51.