

DEATH HIGHLIGHTS

A total of 15,451 deaths occurred among Nebraska residents in 2008, an increase from the 15,256 deaths that occurred in 2007. The 2008 figure translates into a crude mortality rate of 8.7 deaths per 1,000 residents and an age-adjusted mortality rate of 741.1 deaths per 100,000 residents.

The average age at death among Nebraska residents in 2008 was 75.4 years, an increase 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 2008 was 79.1 years for Nebraska women, which is an increase from the 2007 mark of 78.7 years and is now the state's all-time record, and 71.3 years for Nebraska men, the same figure recorded in 2007.

Nebraska's leading cause of death in 2008 was heart disease, which accounted for 3,492 resident deaths. This figure represents just under one-fourth (22.6%) of all deaths that occurred among Nebraska residents in 2008. 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, 2008 marked the sixth 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 only 115 fewer deaths than heart disease, cancer was the second leading cause of death among Nebraska residents in 2008, and was responsible for 3,377 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 first occurred in 2006 and again in 2007. In 2008, cancer deaths outnumbered heart disease deaths among Nebraska men for the third straight year, by a count of 1,732 to 1,716.

Cancer of the lung was the year's leading cause of cancer deaths among both Nebraska men and women, accounting for 886 deaths (482 men, 404 women). Colorectal (colon and rectum) cancer was Nebraska's second leading cause of cancer deaths overall in 2008, with 366 deaths (190 men, 176 women). However, breast cancer was the second leading cause of cancer deaths among Nebraska women in 2008, claiming 230 lives, and prostate cancer was the #2 cause of cancer deaths among Nebraska men, claiming 191 lives in 2008. Taken together, these four sites were responsible for almost half (49.6%) of the state's cancer deaths in 2008.

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, 1,619 deaths were attributed to cancer in 2008, compared to 821 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 2008, by a count of 2,583 to 1,649.

DEATH HIGHLIGHTS (continued)

After heart disease and cancer, no other single cause of death accounted for more than 10% of Nebraska resident deaths in 2008. Chronic lung disease was Nebraska's third leading cause of death in 2008, accounting for 916 deaths. Cerebrovascular disease (usually referred to as stroke), long the state's third leading cause of death, fell to fourth place in 2008, and was responsible for 825 deaths.

Accidents (also referred to as unintentional injuries) were Nebraska's fifth leading cause of death in 2008, claiming 714 lives. Motor vehicle accidents were once again Nebraska's leading cause of accidental deaths, accounting for 241 fatalities, which is the state's lowest figure since 1995. Falls were the #2 cause of accidental deaths, with 207 resident fatalities in 2008. Sixteen of the state's accidental deaths in 2008 were farm-related. Accidents were the leading cause of death in 2008 among Nebraska residents under the age of 45 years (excluding infants under one year of age), accounting for 226 (27.8%) of 814 deaths.

Alzheimer's Disease has now ranked among the top ten causes of death in Nebraska for over a decade, and in 2008 it was again the state's sixth leading cause of death. The number of Nebraska deaths attributed to Alzheimer's Disease in 2008 (610) is an all-time record, surpassing the previous record of 512, which was set in 2007. After Alzheimer's Disease, Nebraska's top ten causes of death in 2008 included diabetes (with 470 deaths), pneumonia (331 deaths), nephritis and nephrosis (270 deaths), and suicide (191 deaths).

A total of 146 infant deaths occurred among Nebraska residents in 2008, which translates into an infant mortality rate of 5.4 per 1,000 live births. This figure represents a decrease from the 2007 rate of 6.8, and ties the state's all-time lowest infant mortality rate, which was recorded in 2003. The leading cause of infant deaths in Nebraska in 2008 was birth defects, which accounted for 34 deaths. Low birth weight babies accounted for 98 (67.1%) of Nebraska's infant deaths, with 74 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 2008 infant deaths, with a count of 90, while post-neonates (infants between 28 days and one year of age) accounted for the remaining 56.