
Death rates vary by gender, ethnicity and location

By Editor Test *Mon, Jul 18, 2011*

Though widely feared, Alzheimer's disease was officially blamed for only seven percent of deaths among the elderly in 2009, according to a data brief from the National Center for Health Statistics.

Even as they age, Americans are gaining life expectancy. Or so it seems.

Average life expectancy at birth is 78.2 years among Americans, and average life expectancy at age 65 has reached 18.8 years, an increase of 6.8% since 2000. But the risk of dying varies by gender, race, ethnicity and geographical location.

Those were among the findings in "Death in the United States, 2009," a data brief published this month by the National Center for Health Statistics.

In 2009, the age-adjusted death rate for the United States reached a record low of 741 per 100,000. Between 2000 and 2009, the gap in life expectancy between white persons and black persons in the United States declined by 22%, to 4.3 years.

The southeast states and non-Hispanic African-Americans tend to have the highest death rates. The gap between the life expectancies of white and black Americans at age 65 fell to 1.3 years in 2009 from 1.6 years in 2000, however.

After adjusting for differences in average age, the brief said the following ten states had the highest death rates: Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Tennessee and West Virginia.

Although the data brief doesn't mention financial factors, death rates appear to correlate with income. Seven of these states rank 45th through 51st in median annual income and none rank higher than 37th, according to worldlifeexpectancy.com.

If current trends continue, heart disease may fall behind cancer as the leading cause of death (heart disease mortality has fallen faster than cancer mortality) and male and female life expectancies will continue to approach convergence.

Between birth and age 44, the most common causes of death in the U.S. are accidents and homicides. Between ages 45 and 64, the most common cause of death is cancer. From age 65 onward, the most common cause of death is heart disease. Alzheimer's disease was blamed for only seven percent of deaths among the elderly in 2009.

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