

Leading causes of death for the total population and for specific subpopulations are examined in a separate report on leading causes by age, race, ethnicity, and sex (3).

Firearm mortality

In 1999 a total of 28,874 persons died from firearm injuries in the United States (tables 17 and 19). This number was 5.7 percent lower than the comparability-modified 30,625 deaths in 1998. Firearm suicide and homicide, the two major component causes, accounted for 57.5 and 37.5 percent, respectively, of all firearm injury deaths in 1999. The other components—firearm accidents, firearm injuries of undetermined intent, and legal intervention involving firearms—account for 2.9, 1.1, and 1.0 percent, respectively. Among those aged 19 years and under, the number of firearm deaths was 10.7 percent lower than in 1998. Despite the decrease, in 1999 children under 20 years accounted for 11.7 percent of all firearm deaths.

Of the firearm injury deaths in 1999, 62.1 percent were white males, 21.4 percent were black males, 11.1 percent were white females, and 2.9 percent were black females. The largest number of firearm deaths for males were for the age group 20–24 years; the largest number of firearm deaths for females were for the age group 35–39 years. Although the number of firearm deaths was highest for white males, age-adjusted death rates for firearm injuries were greatest for black males, followed by white males, black females, and white females. Over the age of 50, age-specific death rates for firearm injury with the exception of age group 55–59 years were highest for white males (table 18).

Between 1998 and 1999 age-specific death rates for firearm injuries declined for all age groups. The largest decline in firearm mortality between 1998 and 1999 was 26.1 percent for the age group 10–14 years.

In 1999 the age-adjusted death rate for firearm injuries was 10.6 deaths per 100,000 U.S. standard population, 6.2 percent lower than the rate of 11.3 in 1998. The rate decreased by 6.5 percent for black males, 6.3 percent for white males, and 6.7 for white females. The change for black females was not statistically significant. In 1999 the rate for males was 6.3 times that for females, and the rate for the black population was 2.0 that of the white population.

The age-adjusted death rate decreased 9.3 percent for firearm homicide, 6.2 percent for firearm suicide, and remained the same for firearm accidents between 1998 and 1999. In 1999 age-specific death rates for firearm homicide were highest for the age group 20–24 years. Black males aged 20–24 years had the highest rate at 100.8 per 100,000 population. The highest rate for suicide by firearms was 43.5 for white males 85 years and over.

Drug-induced mortality

In 1999 a total of 19,102 persons died of drug-induced causes in the United States (table 20). The category “drug-induced causes” includes not only deaths from dependent and nondependent use of drugs (legal and illegal use), but also poisoning from medically prescribed and other drugs. It excludes accidents, homicides, and other causes indirectly related to drug use. Also excluded are newborn deaths due to mother’s drug use. (For drug-induced causes, see Technical notes.) Between 1998 and 1999 the age-adjusted death rate for drug-induced causes decreased 6.7 percent from the

comparability-modified 7.5 deaths per 100,000 U.S. standard population to 7.0. In 1999 the rate for males was 2.2 times that of females, and the rate for the black population was 1.4 times that of the white population.

Alcohol-induced mortality

In 1999 a total of 19,171 persons died of alcohol-induced causes in the United States (table 21). The category “alcohol-induced causes” includes not only deaths from dependent and nondependent use of alcohol but also accidental poisoning by alcohol. It excludes accidents, homicides, and other causes indirectly related to alcohol use as well as deaths due to fetal alcohol syndrome. (For alcohol-induced causes, see Technical notes.) The age-adjusted death rate for alcohol-induced causes remained unchanged at 7.1 deaths per 100,000 U.S. standard population between 1998 (comparability-modified data) and 1999. In 1999 the rate for males was 3.6 times the rate for females, and the rate for the black population was 1.4 times that of the white population.

Marital status

Among those aged 15 years and over, the number of deaths in 1999 of persons who were married was 947,981; widowed, 913,912; never married, 234,167; and divorced, 244,739 (table 22) (see Technical notes). For the total population, but not for males and females separately, those never married had the highest age-adjusted death rate, followed by divorced, widowed, and married persons, respectively. The never-married group had an age-adjusted death rate 67 percent higher than the ever married and 2.2 times the rate for the currently married. Rates for widowed and divorced persons were 81 percent and 86 percent higher, respectively, than for those who were currently married at the time of death.

For all age groups 15 years and over, death rates for married persons were much lower than those for never-married persons. For ages 25–34 years, widowed persons had the highest death rates; but beginning at age 35, those who never married had the highest death rates.

For each marital status group, males had higher age-adjusted death rates than females, ranging from 43 percent greater among the never married to 83 percent greater among the currently married in 1999. Married and widowed black persons had significantly higher age-adjusted death rates than white persons, with rates 42 percent and 14 percent higher, respectively. Differences between black and white never married and divorced persons were not statistically significant.

Educational attainment

Age-specific and age-adjusted death rates are shown by educational attainment for age groups in the range 25–64 years (table 23). In 46 reporting States and the District of Columbia, a total of 213,929 decedents aged 25–64 years completed 12 years of education, compared with 149,346 who completed 13 years or more and 111,037 who completed less than 12 years. For the total population, and for males and females separately, mortality is inversely associated with educational attainment; that is, the average risk of death decreases markedly with increasing educational attainment. The age-adjusted death rate for those with less than 12 years of education was 585.3 per 100,000 U.S. standard population—23.3