HOW TRACKING DEATHS PROTECTS Health

Data We Count On

Vital Statistics

Birth and death data—known as vital statistics—provide a valuable picture of the nation's health. Mortality surveillance tracks the characteristics of those dying in the United States, helps determine life expectancy, and allows comparisons of death trends with other countries. How people die provides insights into health threats encountered when they lived.

> *"Specificity about a death today could help save a life tomorrow. For example, a death certificate needs to say more than something vague like 'opioid intoxication' to help both law enforcement and public health officials curb the distribution—and hopefully abuse—of opioids."*
>
> — **James Gill, MD**
> Chief Medical Examiner, state of Connecticut

Why It Matters

Death certificates were one of the first sources of public health surveillance data. When we look at mortality data, every death certificate tells a story. When viewed collectively, they uncover health disparities, inform policy and funding decisions, and improve outbreak and disaster response efforts. Information from death certificates is increasingly used to expose and address a national crisis—drug-poisoning deaths. Improving reporting of the specific drug(s) on the death certificate is one way to help save future lives.

Mortality data are used routinely to:

- **Detect initial cases** of infectious diseases, trauma, and toxicity that might signal a larger public health emergency
- **Monitor specific preventable deaths,** like drug-poisoning deaths, and craft a public health response
- **Raise awareness of issues** like heart disease, cancer, diabetes, child nutrition, Alzheimer's disease, and suicide
- **Provide insights** on what steps can be taken to prevent further lives lost

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Putting Data to Work: Numbers Tell the Story

Our federal data assets are only as strong as our state and local resources. Tracking and reporting mortality is a complex and decentralized process with a variety of systems used by more than 6,000 local vital registrars to report death. State, local, and territorial authorities—known as jurisdictions—are responsible for the legal registration and record of death. CDC, through the National Center for Health Statistics, finalizes and releases the data once all authorities have reported.

CDC and local authorities are working together as part of CDC's strategy to improve surveillance data to advance how quickly deaths are recorded and reported

Newer

Paper-based systems are being replaced with modern Web-based technologies, and outdated electronic systems are being upgraded

Faster

More timely data are being made available through the early release of information from death certificates through quarterly and special reports

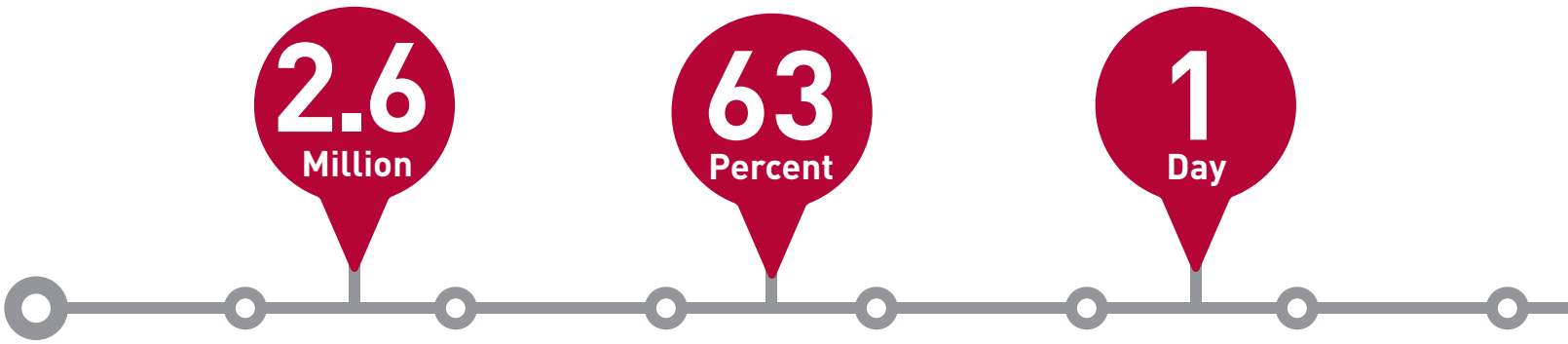
Smarter

Electronic health records and other tools are being leveraged to integrate death reporting into physicians' daily workflows

Better

Systems are being developed to validate mortality data before they are sent to the states

Moving the Dial: Improved Reporting, More Answers



Approximate number of U.S. deaths analyzed annually through CDC's National Vital Statistics System

Percent of death records reported to CDC within 10 days—up from 7% in 2010

Goal for all jurisdictions to report registered deaths to public health agencies