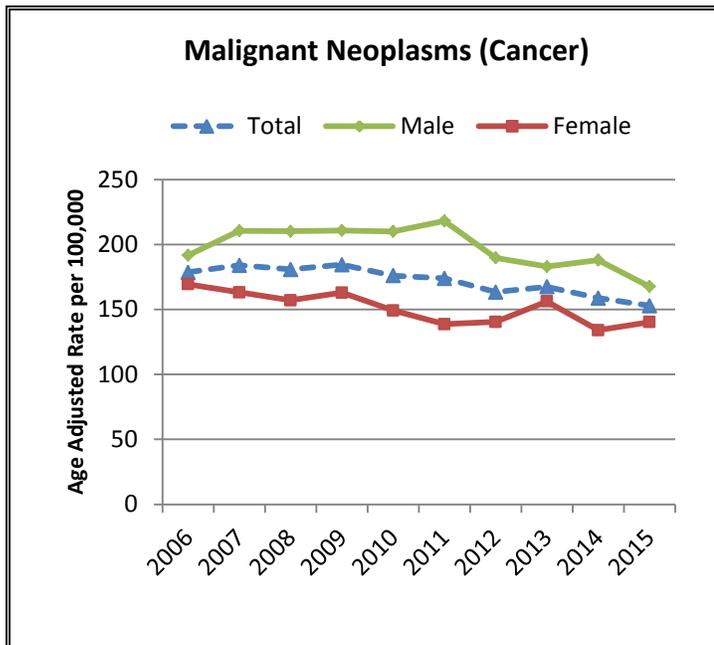
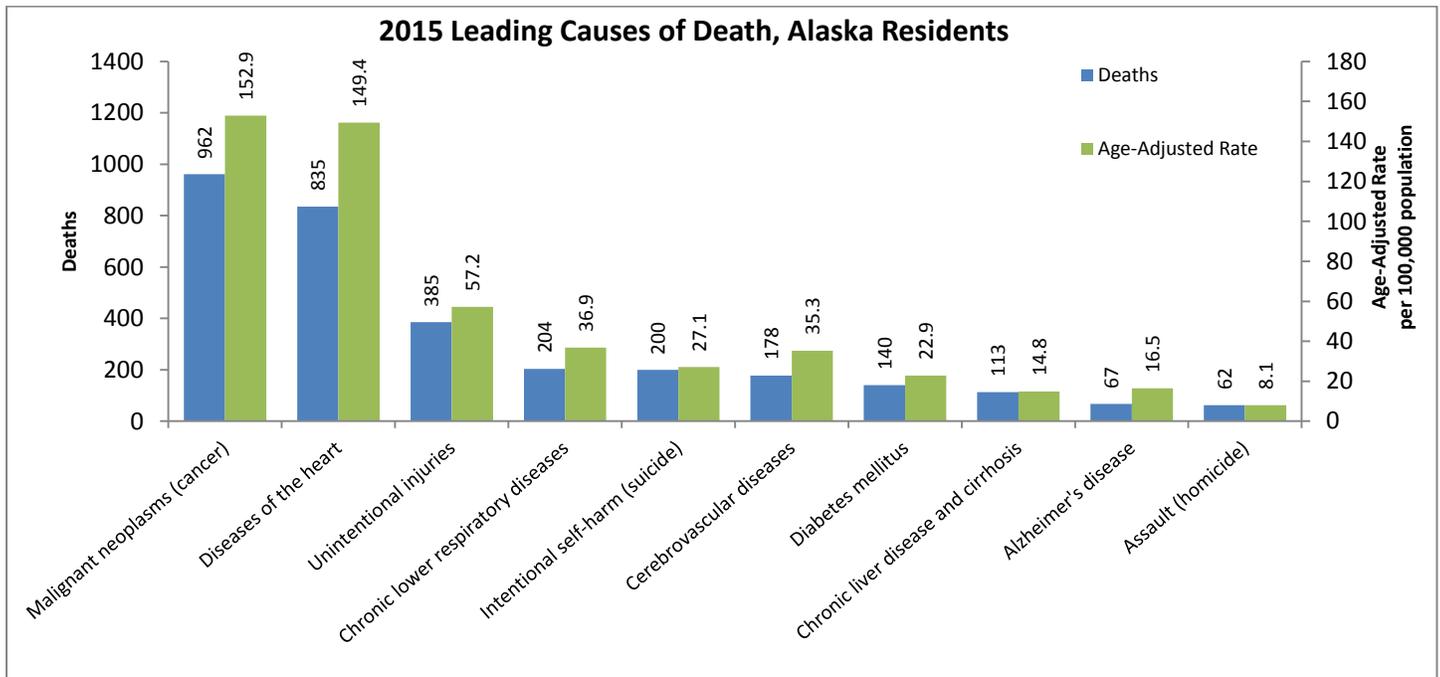




Leading Causes of Death in Alaska, 2015

In 2015, the top ten leading causes of death claimed the lives of 3,146 Alaska residents, accounting for 73% of 4,324 total deaths. This document presents key findings of an analysis of the 2015 leading causes of death by age, sex, race group and Public Health Region.¹ The 10 leading causes are the same as in 2014, with the exception of the tenth leading cause. In 2014, Influenza and Pneumonia was the tenth leading cause of death whereas Assault (homicide) was the tenth leading cause in 2015. Leading causes of death are ranked by the number of deaths rather than rates to be consistent with national rankings. All rates in this document, aside from age-group specific rates, are age-adjusted (per 100,000, of the 2000 US standard population). Rates are presented along with number of deaths to allow comparison between populations from different areas, different demographic groups (e.g. race, sex), or different time periods.



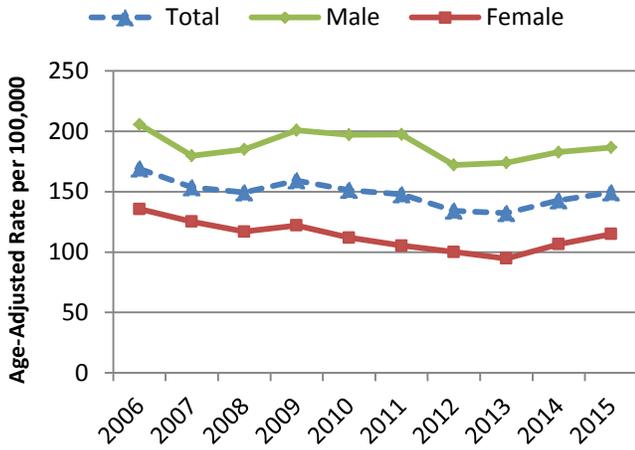
Malignant neoplasms (cancer) were the leading cause of death in Alaska with a mortality rate of 152.9 per 100,000 in 2015, close to the rate in the US as a whole (158.5).² The Northern Public Health Region had the highest cancer mortality rate (220.9) compared to other regions (136.3 to 167.7). The rate for white individuals (142.9) was 65% lower than for American Indian/Alaska Native people (235.9) in 2015. Cancer was the leading cause of death for decedents aged 45 years and older, with highest rate in those 65 years and older (776.2).

Cancer mortality rates have decreased and were consistently lower in Alaska females compared to Alaska males from 2006 to 2015. National declines in cancer mortality, which mirror declines seen in Alaska, have been attributed to a combination of declines in cigarette smoking^{3,4} and improvements in cancer treatment and early detection.⁵

More Alaskans died of cancer of the trachea, bronchus, and lung than any other type. The rate for this type of cancer has decreased from 46.6 in 2006 to 40 per 100,000 in 2015. Tobacco use, the leading cause of lung cancer, has been declining in Alaska since the late 20th Century.⁶

As of 2015, the Healthy Alaskans 2020 goal of fewer than 162 cancer deaths per 100,000 year 2000 standard population has been met.

Diseases of the heart

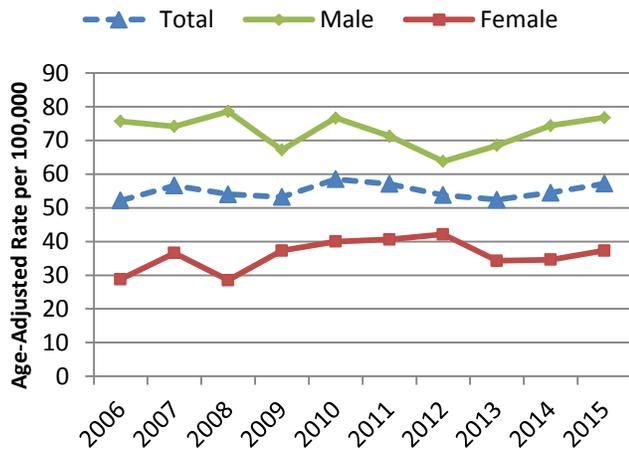


Diseases of the heart were the second leading cause of death in Alaska in 2015 with a mortality rate of 149.4 per 100,000, lower than the US as a whole (168.5).² The rate has decreased overall and for both sexes from 2006 to 2015. Alaska females had lower heart disease mortality rates than Alaska males during that same time period.

The mortality rate due to heart disease was lowest in the Matanuska-Susitna Public Health Region (122.8) compared to other regions (130.4 to 218.7) in 2015. White individuals had rate (138.0) 64% lower than for American Indian/Alaska Native people (225.6). Heart disease was in the top 3 leading causes of death for those 35 years and older, and was highest in those 65 years and older (733.4).

Modifiable risk factors for heart disease include high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes and prediabetes, physical inactivity, unhealthy diet, obesity and smoking.⁷

Unintentional injuries

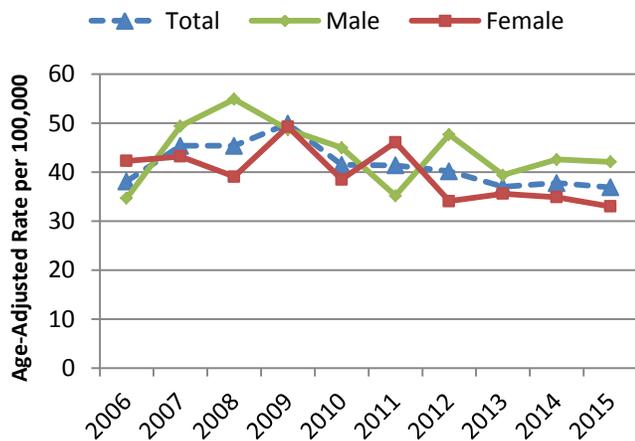


Unintentional injuries and poisonings were the third leading cause of death in Alaska in 2015. The mortality rate due to injuries was 57.2 per 100,000, higher than the US as a whole in 2015 (43.2).² The injury mortality rate has been more or less consistent over the last 10 years. The Southwest Public Health Region had the highest rate (123.0) compared to other regions (44.9 to 75.8) in 2015. Alaska males (76.8) and American Indian/Alaska Native people (130.4) had unintentional injury mortality rates 2 or more times those of Alaska females (37.3) and White Alaskans (45.5) respectively.

Years of potential life lost (YPLL) is a measure of the difference between an assumed natural lifespan of 75 years and the actual age of death. Unintentional injuries were responsible for 11,151 years of potential life lost in 2015, more than any other cause of death in Alaska. Unintentional injuries were the leading cause of death in the 25 to 44 year age groups. Alaska people age 45 to 54 (60.3) years had the highest injury mortality rate compared to other age groups in 2015.

As of 2015, the Healthy Alaskans 2020 goal of fewer than 54.8 unintentional injury deaths per 100,000 has not been met (57.2).

Chronic lower respiratory diseases

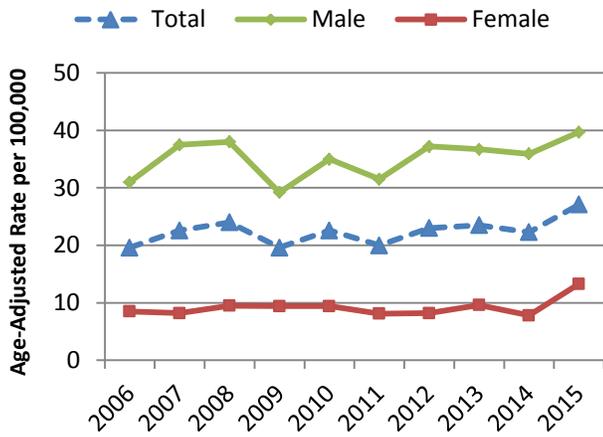


Chronic lower respiratory diseases (CLRD) were the fourth leading cause of death in Alaska with a mortality rate of 36.9 per 100,000, lower than the US as a whole in 2015 (41.6).² The Northern Public Health Region had the highest rate of CLRD mortality (71.4*) compared to other regions (29.9 to 64.2) in 2015. Alaska females (33.0) had a rate lower than males (42.1) in 2015, although this has not been consistent from 2006 to 2015. The CLRD mortality rate for American Indian/Alaska Native people (67.9) was slightly more than 100% higher than the rate for white individuals (32.7).

Smoking is the dominant cause of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), the largest component of CLRD.⁸ Prevalence of adult smoking is significantly higher in the Northern (39%) and Southwestern (31%) regions of the state compared to other regions (17% to 21%).⁶

* Rate in one or more years or groups is based on greater than 6 but fewer than 20 occurrences, and may be statistically unreliable.

Intentional self-harm (suicide)



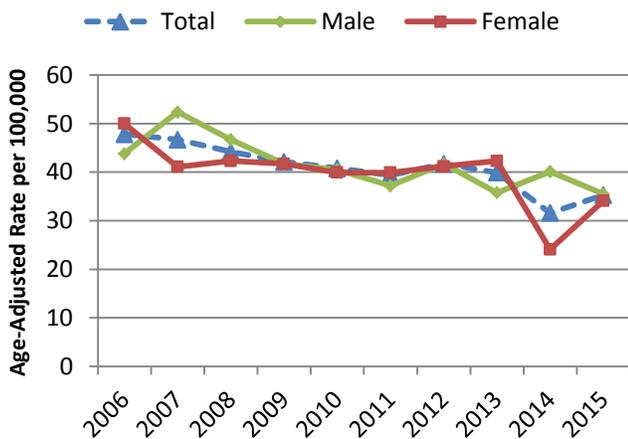
Intentional self-harm, or suicide, was the fifth leading cause of death in Alaska with a mortality rate of 27.1 per 100,000 in 2015, twice the rate in the US (13.3).² Suicide mortality in 2015 was at the highest rate since 2006. Mortality due to suicide was much higher in the Northern (56.3)* and Southwest (63.0) Public Health Regions compared to other regions (18.6 to 29.0).

The suicide mortality rate in males was approximately 3 times that in females from 2006 to 2015. In 2015, American Indian/Alaska Native people had a rate (50.4) more than twice that of other race groups. The 15 to 24 age group had a suicide mortality rate of 55.4 per 100,000; the rate was also high in the 25 to 34 years (33.0) and 35 to 44 years (33.8) age groups. In 2015, firearms were the leading mechanism of death by suicide, making up 61 percent of all suicide deaths.

In Alaska, one in five (20.1%) high school students reported seriously considering suicide in 2015, a significant increase from 2013 (16.2%).⁹

The Healthy Alaskans 2020 goal of fewer than 43.2 suicide deaths per 100,000 population aged 15-24, and fewer than 23.5 suicide deaths per 100,000 population aged 25 and over, has not been met. The rate for these age groups in 2015 was 55.4 and 29.5, respectively.

Cerebrovascular diseases

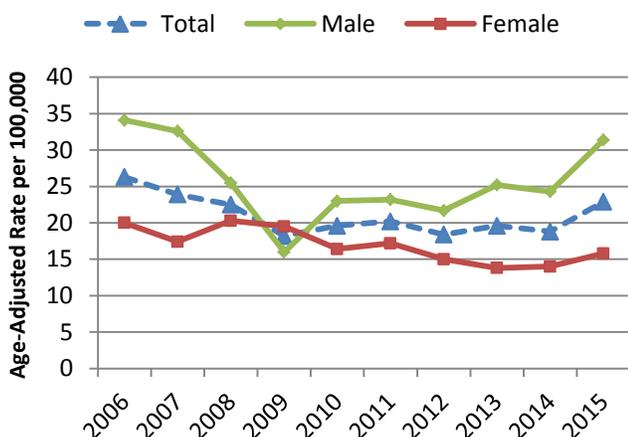


Cerebrovascular disease (stroke), was the sixth leading cause of death in Alaska in 2015 with a mortality rate of 35.3 per 100,000, close to the rate in the US as a whole (37.6).² Stroke mortality has decreased during the last 10 years. The rate in females (34.1) was very similar to that for males (35.5) in 2015, and was highest in American Indian/Alaska Native people (48.6) compared to other race groups.

Mortality due to stroke was lowest in the Southeast Public Health Region (30.5) compared to other regions (32.9 to 39.9)* in 2015.

Modifiable risk factors for stroke include hypertension, heart disease, diabetes, high cholesterol, smoking, physical inactivity, unhealthy diet, and obesity.¹⁰

Diabetes mellitus



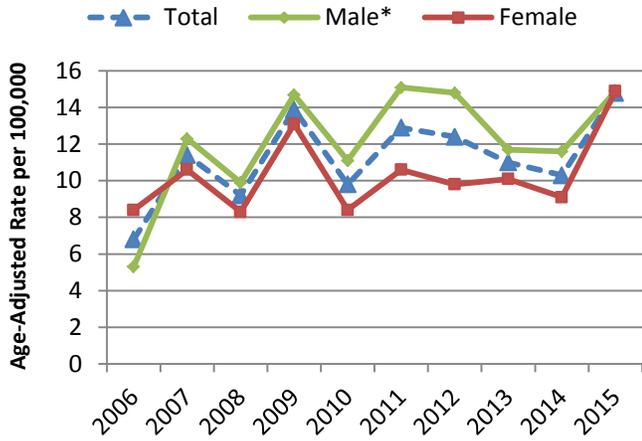
Diabetes was the seventh leading cause of death in Alaska and had a mortality rate of 22.9 per 100,000 in 2015 compared to the rate of 21.3 per 100,000 in the US as a whole.² The diabetes mortality rate for male Alaskans was higher than for females in most years from 2006 to 2015. The rate was highest (41.0) in people in race groups other than white or American Indian/Alaska Native (black, Asian/Pacific Islander) in 2015.

The diabetes mortality rate was highest in the Matanuska-Susitna Public Health Region (32.3) compared to other regions (18.0 to 25.5)* in 2015. The greatest number of deaths from diabetes was in those age 65 to 74 years (41) and the highest rate was in Alaska adults age 85 years and older (295.9)*.

The majority of diabetes is type 2 diabetes. It is estimated that 90% of type 2 diabetes incidence could be avoided by adherence to the following lifestyle factors: physical activity, a healthy diet, maintaining a healthy weight, not smoking, and no moderate alcohol consumption.¹¹

* Rate in one or more years or groups is based on greater than 6 but fewer than 20 occurrences, and may be statistically unreliable.

Chronic liver disease and cirrhosis

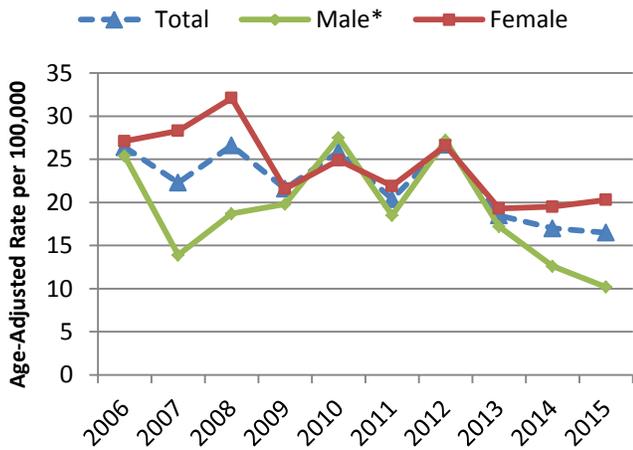


Chronic liver disease and cirrhosis was the eighth leading cause of death in Alaska. The chronic liver disease mortality rate has increased from 2006 (6.8) to 2015 (14.8), the single largest 10 year increase of any leading cause of death. The US rate in 2015 was 10.8 per 100,000.²

Mortality rates due to chronic liver disease in female and male Alaskans were the same (14.9) in 2015. The mortality rate in American Indian/Alaska Native people (36.8) was more than 3 times that in white individuals (11.5) and almost 5 times that for people in other race groups (7.8)* in 2015. In terms of Public Health Region, the rate was highest in the Southeast Region (19.9)* compared to other regions (10.8 to 17.5)* in 2015.

The prevalence of adult binge drinking, or consumption of 4 or more alcoholic drinks at one occasion for women and 5 or more for men, has fluctuated between 18% and 22% over the past decade. Prevalence of adult heavy drinking, defined as men having more than 2 drinks every day or women having more than 1 drink every day, has increased from 5.1% in 2005 to 7.9% in 2015 (Source: Alaska BRFSS).

Alzheimer's disease

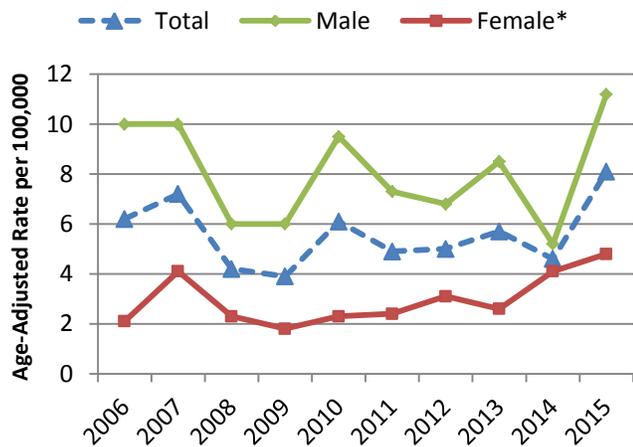


Alzheimer's disease was the ninth leading cause of death in Alaska in 2015 with a mortality rate of 16.5 per 100,000, lower than the rate in the US as a whole (29.4).² The Alzheimer's mortality rate among female Alaskans (20.3) was twice that among males (10.2)*. The mortality rate has decreased 38% from 2006 (26.4) to 2015 (16.5).

The Alzheimer's mortality rate among white individuals (15.9) was lower than for American Indian/Alaska Native people (19.7)* in 2015. The Matanuska-Susitna Public Health Region (23.9)* had the highest mortality rate compared to other regions (15.0 to 17.3)*.

Alzheimer's disease is highly associated with age; all deaths due to this disease were in adults age 55 years and older in 2015.

Assault (homicide)



Assault (homicide) was the tenth leading cause of death in Alaska in 2015, replacing influenza and pneumonia. The rate in Alaska (8.1) was higher than the rate in the US as a whole in 2015 (5.7).² Homicide mortality rates were consistently higher for males than females and have increased overall from 2006 to 2015. American Indian/Alaska Native people (24.1) had a homicide mortality rate nearly 5 times that in white people (4.1)* in 2015.

The greatest number of homicides took place in the Anchorage Public Health Region in 2015; the highest homicide mortality rate was in the Southwest Region (15.6)* and the lowest was in the Anchorage Region (7.6).

* Rate in one or more years or groups is based on greater than 6 but fewer than 20 occurrences, and may be statistically unreliable.

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This report was prepared by the Health Analytics Unit of the Alaska Health Analytics and Vital Records Section with assistance from the Section of Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

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