

Traffic Safety Facts

Research Note

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Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes as a Leading Cause of Death in the United States, 2000

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Introduction

This Research Note examines the status of motor vehicle traffic crashes as a leading cause of death in the United States in 2000. It is based on a study, by age and sex, of the ranking of 70 causes of death which have been adopted by the National Center for Statistics and Analysis (NCSA) of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). This study was originally prompted by a number of unanswered questions regarding adequate background material and appropriate information pertaining to the general concept of motor vehicle traffic crashes as a leading cause of death. Although the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), in its annual report on mortality, publishes detailed tabulations of the leading causes of death, the fatalities due to motor vehicle traffic crashes are "lumped" under the very general category of Unintentional Injuries. Fatalities due to motor vehicle traffic crashes comprise a significant proportion of all fatalities due to unintentional injuries at certain ages and this has prompted NHTSA to separate motor vehicle crashes as an individual cause of death in this report. The data used in this report is the public use file of the final mortality data for the U.S. in 2000, as provided by NCHS.

The NCSA-adopted listing of 70 causes of death is comprehensive in that all underlying causes are represented. Fifty-six of these 70 adopted causes reflect the underlying causes based on internal morbid bodily conditions, while the remaining 14 NCSA-adopted causes reflect the underlying causes based on external factors such as crashes and acts of violence. This 70-cause listing is not an arbitrary listing, but is generally in close agreement with a special listing of death causes used by the NCHS to report on leading causes of death in the United States. The latter differs from the NCSA listing primarily in causal areas related to infectious diseases that currently result in only small numbers of deaths (e.g., whooping cough, measles, etc.), but are of continuing interest as a public health concern, and, secondarily, in those areas relating to accidental death. Accordingly, the rank of some causes of death will differ from those reported by NCHS. This difference will mostly be observed for minor causes of death in smaller groups of age.

The table (overleaf) shows the ten leading causes of death by age. The age groups reflect categories of interest to NHTSA in terms of Child-Restraint Programs (Toddlers, Infants and

Young Children), New Drivers (Youth and Young Adults), Other Adults and the Elderly. The ranks reflect the status of the cause of death in that age category. Overall, motor vehicle traffic crashes ranked 8th as a cause of death for all ages. When ranked by specific age, motor vehicle traffic crashes are the leading cause of death for every age 2 through 33. Some of the causes of death in the table are aggregated causes like Perinatal Period (all conditions originating in the perinatal period), Other (Symptoms, Signs and Ill-Defined Conditions, not elsewhere classified), Other/Unspecified Nontransport (Accidental causes not otherwise classifiable under existing cause listing). NHTSA will publish a comprehensive report titled Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes as a Leading Cause of Death in the U.S., 2000 that will describe the ranking in greater detail.

Years of Life Lost: This is the number of remaining years that the person is expected to live had they not died. The number of years of life lost due to a particular cause is the aggregate of years of life lost for all persons that died due to that cause. The expected years of remaining life is calculated using standard tables of life expectancy by age (United States Life Tables 2000, NCHS).

Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes as a Leading Cause of Death in the United States for 2000, by Age Group

R A N K	Deaths Due to Causes by Age Groups**											Years of Life Lost ¹
	Infants Under 1	Toddlers 1-3	Young Children 4-7	Children 8-15	Youth 16-20	Young Adults 21-24	Other Adults			Elderly 65+	All Ages	
							25-34	35-44	45-64			
1	Perinatal Period 13,918	Congenital Anomalies 447	MV Traffic Crashes 567	MV Traffic Crashes 1,681	MV Traffic Crashes 5,873	MV Traffic Crashes 3,982	MV Traffic Crashes 6,716	Malignant Neoplasms 16,520	Malignant Neoplasms 137,039	Heart Disease 593,707	Heart Disease 710,760	Malignant Neoplasms 23% (8,468,700)
2	Congenital Anomalies 5,743	MV Traffic Crashes 430	Malignant Neoplasms 426	Malignant Neoplasms 827	Homicide 2,476	Homicide 2,385	Suicide 4,792	Heart Disease 13,181	Heart Disease 98,879	Malignant Neoplasms 392,366	Malignant Neoplasms 553,091	Heart Disease 22% (8,091,669)
3	Other 3,639	Accidental Drowning 427	Smoke Exposure 202	Suicide 489	Suicide 1,911	Suicide 1,900	Homicide 4,274	MV Traffic Crashes 6,757	Stroke 15,967	Stroke 148,045	Stroke 167,661	Stroke 5% (1,708,035)
4	Oth./Unsp. Nontransport 572	Homicide 323	Accidental Drowning 200	Homicide 431	Malignant Neoplasms 794	Malignant Neoplasms 788	Malignant Neoplasms 3,916	Suicide 6,562	Diabetes 14,140	Obstructive Pulm. Disease 106,375	Obstructive Pulm. Disease 122,009	MV Traffic Crashes 5% (1,674,868)
5	Heart Disease 493	Malignant Neoplasms 312	Nervous Disease 183	Nervous Disease 374	Accidental Poisoning 468	Accidental Poisoning 669	Heart Disease 2,958	HIV 5,919	Obstructive Pulm. Disease 13,990	Pneumonia 57,011	Diabetes 69,301	Obstructive Pulm. Disease 4% (1,414,309)
6	Homicide 349	Other 228	Congenital Anomalies 173	Congenital Anomalies 330	Heart Disease 443	Heart Disease 519	HIV 2,437	Accidental Poisoning 4,663	Liver Disease 12,428	Diabetes 52,414	Pneumonia 63,548	Prenatal Period 3% (1,080,590)
7	Nervous Disease 293	Oth./Unsp. Nontransport 222	Homicide 127	Accidental Drowning 300	Other 380	Other 444	Accidental Poisoning 2,380	Liver Disease 3,371	MV Traffic Crashes 8,583	Alzheimer's 48,993	Alzheimer's 49,558	Suicide 3% (1,032,765)
8	Pneumonia 280	Smoke Exposure 221	Oth./Unsp. Nontransport 112	Heart Disease 269	Accidental Drowning 366	Oth./Unsp. Nontransport 286	Other 1,554	Homicide 3,320	Suicide 8,382	Mental Retardation 36,656	MV Traffic Crashes 41,995	Diabetes 3% (970,832)
9	Septicemia 274	Nervous Disease 209	Heart Disease 89	Oth./Unsp. Nontransport 239	Nervous Disease 330	Nervous Disease 249	Oth./Unsp. Nontransport 895	Other 2,987	Other 5,395	Nephritis 31,225	Mental Retardation 38,882	Other 2% (825,216)
10	Other Resp. Disease 254	Heart Disease 163	Other 75	Metabolic Disorder 174	Oth./Unsp. Nontransport 322	Accidental Drowning 221	Injury Intent Unk. 679	Stroke 2,599	HIV 5,381	Septicemia 24,786	Nephritis 37,251	Homicide 2% (792,291)
ALL*	28,035	4,195	2,823	6,933	15,727	14,021	40,451	89,798	401,187	1,799,825	2,403,351	All Causes 100% (36,067,102)

¹Number of years calculated based on remaining life expectancy at time of death; percents calculated as a proportion of total years of life lost due to all causes of death.

Source: National Center for Health Statistics, CDC, Mortality Data 2000. *Not a total of top 10 causes of death.

Note: The cause of death classification is based on the National Center for Statistics and Analysis (NCSA) Revised 70 Cause of Death Listing. Accordingly, the rank of some causes of death will differ from those reported by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). This difference will mostly be observed for minor causes of death in smaller age groupings.

**When ranked by specific ages, motor vehicle traffic crashes are the leading cause of death for every age 2 through 33.