

LEADING CAUSES

Leading Causes

Heart disease and cancer continue to be the leading causes of death among Massachusetts residents ([Figure 4](#)). In 1996, 16,772 Massachusetts residents died of heart disease, yielding an age-adjusted death rate of 116.8/100,000 (Table 2). Cancer was the second leading cause of death, representing 13,920 deaths, with an age-adjusted rate of 130.6. (Note that the number of deaths due to heart disease is greater than the number of deaths due to cancer, yet the age-adjusted death rate for heart disease is lower than the age-adjusted cancer rate. Refer to the Glossary in the Appendix for an explanation of age-adjusted rates.)

On average, 150 Massachusetts residents died every day in 1996 ([Figure 5](#)). Approximately 46 of these deaths were due to heart disease and 38 were due to cancer.

Heart disease was the leading cause of death for Massachusetts residents ages 65 and above, while cancer was the leading cause of death for persons ages 45-64 ([Table 3](#)).

In 1996, cancer replaced AIDS and HIV-related illnesses as the leading cause of death for Massachusetts residents ages 25-44. AIDS and HIV-related diseases had been the leading cause of death in this age group for four consecutive years.

For persons ages 15-24, injuries accounted for 56% of the deaths. Motor vehicle-related deaths accounted for the largest proportion of deaths, followed by homicides and suicides.

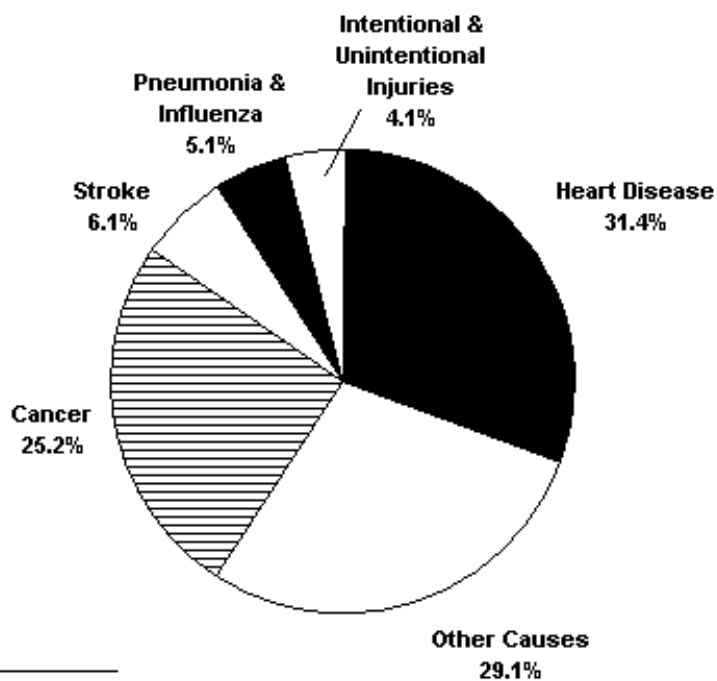
Among 1-14 year-olds, the leading cause of death was unintentional injuries (excluding motor vehicle-related injuries) followed by cancer.

The leading causes of death varied markedly by race and ethnicity in Massachusetts in 1996, as in previous years ([Table 4](#)). Nine of the ten leading causes of death for whites were chronic diseases (such as heart disease, cancer, stroke, respiratory illness, and diabetes), which especially afflict older people. The leading causes of death for blacks and Hispanics included homicide, which occurs more frequently among younger people, and perinatal conditions which occur in infancy. AIDS was the third leading cause of death for Hispanics and blacks. In 1995, AIDS was the leading cause of death for Hispanics and the third leading cause for blacks.

The differences in the leading causes of death among whites, blacks, and Hispanics result from a combination of factors. First, younger age distributions within the Massachusetts black and Hispanic populations yield higher proportions of deaths from causes typically affecting the young. Second, among the younger age groups, blacks and Hispanics have higher age-specific death rates for such causes as AIDS and homicide as compared to whites; also, among persons over the age of 44, Hispanics have lower age-specific rates of death from heart disease, cancer and stroke as compared to whites and blacks ([Table 5](#)).

Figure 4

**Percentage Distribution of Leading Causes of Death¹
Massachusetts: 1996**



¹Number of Total Deaths = 55,187

**Figure 5. Daily Death Statistics
Massachusetts: 1996**

Every day in 1996, residents of Massachusetts experienced an average of:

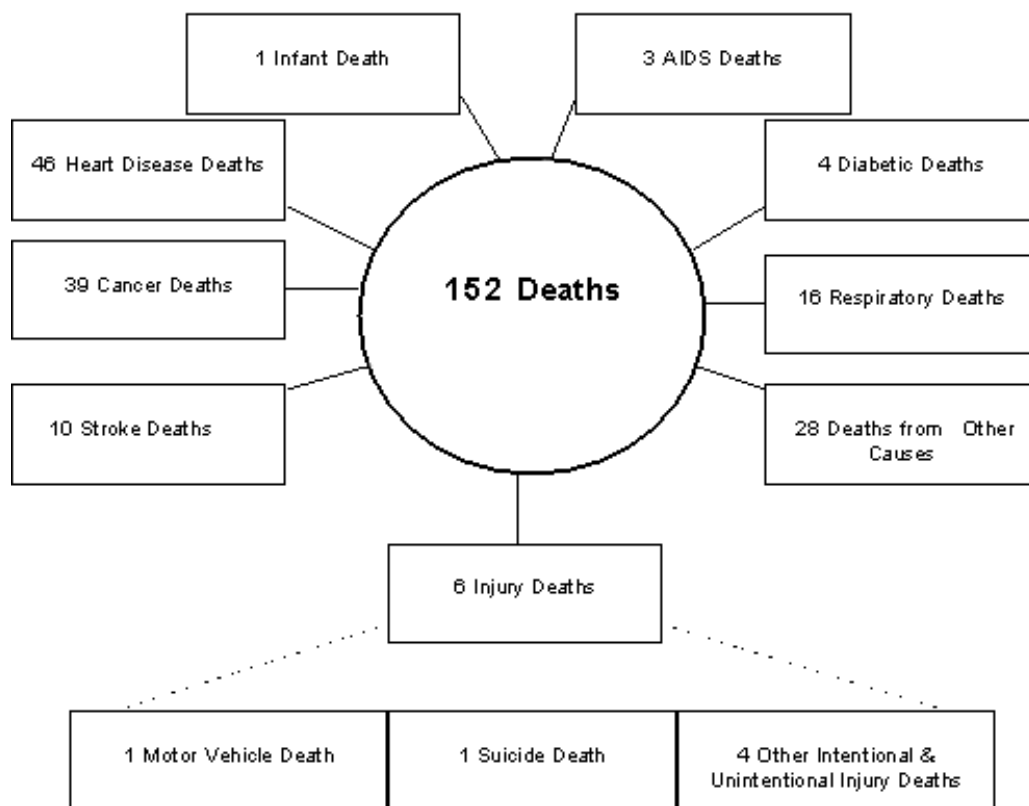


Figure 5

Age	Cause of Death	Deaths	
		Number	Rate ²
1-14 years	Unintentional injuries, excluding motor vehicle injuries	35	3.1
	Cancer	26	2.3
	Congenital anomalies	24	2.2
	Motor vehicle-related injuries	15	1.3
	TOTAL	197	17.7
15-24 years	Motor vehicle-related injuries	116	15.0
	Homicide ³	72	9.3
	Suicide	53	6.8
	Cancer	33	4.3
	TOTAL	434	56.0
25-44 years	Cancer	471	22.5
	AIDS and HIV-related diseases	454	21.7
	Heart disease	307	14.7
	External causes, unknown intent	242	11.6
	TOTAL	2,720	130.1
45-64 years	Cancer	3,029	242.4
	Heart disease	1,910	152.8
	Diabetes	225	18.0
	COPD ⁴	224	17.9
	TOTAL	7,477	598.2
65 + years	Heart disease	14,535	1,706.6
	Cancer	10,358	1,216.2
	Cerebrovascular disease (stroke)	3,078	361.4
	Pneumonia and Influenza	2,817	307.3
	TOTAL	43,950	5,160.2

¹ See Appendix for ICD-9 codes. ² Number of deaths per 100,000 persons in each age group. ³The NCHS categories for 72 selected causes of death combines Homicide (ICD-9 E960-989) and Legal Intervention (ICD-9 E970-978). There were no deaths due to legal intervention in the 15-24 year age group. ⁴Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease.

Table 4. Leading Causes of Death¹ and Age-Adjusted Death Rates by Race and Hispanic Ethnicity², Massachusetts: 1996

White			Black			Hispanic		
Cause	#	Rate ³	Cause	#	Rate	Cause	#	Rate
Total	52,720	436.1	Total	2,025	556.1	Total	803	294.6
Heart disease	16,259	117.3	Cancer	488	150.4	Heart disease	146	62.3
Cancer	13,288	130.4	Heart disease	449	127.2	Cancer	139	58.5
Stroke	3,209	19.7	AIDS and HIV-related diseases	161	37.6	AIDS and HIV-related diseases	101	28.6
Pneumonia/Influenza	2,724	14.8	Stroke	94	26.1	Stroke	90	12.2
COPD ⁴	2,363	18.3	Diabetes	71	21.3	Diabetes	28	13.6
Diabetes	1,275	11.2	Homicide	64	15.0	Motor vehicle injury	26	7.7
Nephritis	822	5.7	Pneumonia/Influenza	60	14.9	Homicide	24	6.4
Unintentional Injury, excluding motor vehicle	766	7.1	COPD	55	14.7	Perinatal conditions	23	5.0
Septicemia	715	5.1	Septicemia	39	10.7	COPD	22	7.1
Other artery disease	684	5.1	Nephritis	36	9.8	Chronic liver disease	22	9.6

¹Ranking based on number of deaths. ²Persons of Hispanic ethnicity are also included in the race categories, consistent with the US Census population classification. ³All rates are age-adjusted per 100,000 residents using the 1940 US Census standard population. ⁴Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease.

Table 5. Number and Age-Specific Rates for Selected Causes of Death by Race and Hispanic Ethnicity, Massachusetts: 1996

Selected Causes	Total		White		Black		Hispanic ¹	
	#	Rate ²	#	Rate	#	Rate	#	Rate
Age: 1-14, TOTAL	197	17.7	162	16.8	24	23.9	25	25.0
Unintentional injuries, excluding motor vehicle injuries	35	3.1	23	2.4	7	7.0	2	.. ³
Cancer	26	2.3	22	2.3	3	--	2	--
Congenital Anomalies	24	2.2	20	2.1	2	--	6	6.0
Motor vehicle related injuries	15	1.3	14	1.5	1	--	3	--
Age: 15-24, TOTAL	434	56.0	357	53.3	62	83.2	48	70.3
Motor vehicle-related injuries	116	15.0	108	16.1	8	10.7	9	13.2
Homicide ⁴	72	9.3	36	5.4	32	43.0	11	16.1
Suicide	53	6.8	49	7.3	2	--	6	8.8
Cancer	33	4.3	30	4.5	2	--	2	--
Age: 25-44, TOTAL	2,720	130.1	2,362	126.5	314	211.3	236	190.9
Cancer	471	22.5	430	23.0	30	20.2	23	18.6
AIDS & HIV-related diseases	454	21.7	336	16.0	113	76.1	65	66.3
Heart disease	307	14.7	280	15.0	25	16.8	16	12.9
External causes, undetermined intent	242	11.6	227	12.2	13	6.8	29	23.5
Age: 45-64, TOTAL	7,477	598.2	6,908	595.1	476	789.4	202	479.8
Cancer	3,029	242.4	2,814	242.4	166	275.3	55	130.6
Heart disease	1,910	152.8	1,793	154.4	101	167.5	41	97.4
Diabetes	225	18.0	202	17.4	23	38.1	13	30.9
COPD ⁵	224	17.9	218	18.3	4	--	6	14.3
Age: 65+, TOTAL	43,950	5,160.2	42,600	5,191.1	1,082	4,928.0	252	1,788.0
Heart Disease	14,535	1,706.6	14,152	1,724.5	349	1,452.9	33	588.9
Cancer	10,355	1,218.2	9,990	1,217.3	266	1302.6	57	404.4
Stroke	3,078	361.4	2,971	362.0	71	323.4	15	106.4
Pneumonia	2,617	307.3	2,565	312.6	44	200.4	12	85.1

¹ Persons of Hispanic ethnicity are also included in the race categories, consistent with the US Census population classification. ² Number of deaths per 100,000 persons in each age group. ³ Calculated only based on fewer than five events are excluded. ⁴ The NCHS categories for 72 selected causes of death combines Homicide (ICD-9 E950-959) and Legal Intervention (ICD-9 E970-979). There were no deaths due to legal intervention in the 15-24 year age group. ⁵ Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease.

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[Appendix](#)