



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Study finds racial differences in mortality

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Alabamians of black and other races have higher death rates and a lower life expectancy than whites, a study by the Alabama Department of Public Health for the years 1998 through 2000 found.

For both racial groups studied, the three leading causes of death were heart disease, cancer and stroke. After the top three causes, the leading causes differed by race. Accidents and diabetes ranked as the fourth and fifth leading causes of death for black and other race Alabamians. For white Alabamians, respiratory diseases and accidents ranked fourth and fifth.

Alabamians of black and other races have a life expectancy at birth of 72 years compared to 75 years for whites. Alabamians of black and other races die at younger ages for nearly all of the important causes of death studied. However, white Alabamians are at a noticeably higher risk for mortality from accidents, suicide and lung-associated diseases such as lung cancer.

The Center for Health Statistics of the Alabama Department of Public Health released these findings in the Alabama Atlas of Racial Disparities in Mortality, a geographical study of racial disparities in the state. According to Kathryn Chapman who authored the study, the multi-colored county maps demonstrate the disparities among counties and between racial groups.

Eliminating disparities in health outcomes is a serious public health concern in Alabama. Gwen Lipscomb, director of Minority Health for the health department, said "It is a concern which should involve state agencies, medical facilities, health centers, schools of public health, health departments, faith organizations and communities. The challenge for us is how we collectively develop and implement strategies to reduce and eliminate the disparities. This atlas is a useful resource to make communities aware of their overall health so they can implement appropriate prevention activities."

The risk of dying from certain causes can be modified by lifestyle changes. Cigarette smoking is the most important risk factor for respiratory diseases. Three of the risk factors for diabetes are physical inactivity, being overweight and having high blood pressure. Motor vehicle fatalities are a major component of accidental deaths. Wearing safety belts lessens the risk of dying in a motor vehicle accident.

"The fact is, wearing a seat belt and placing children in an appropriate car seat really does save lives," said Nancy Wright, director of the health department's Injury Education Branch.
"Everyone should buckle up."

Copies of this publication can be obtained from the Center for Health Statistics, Alabama Department of Public Health, P.O. Box 5625, Montgomery, Ala. 36103-5625, (334) 206-5429.

The atlas is also available on the Alabama Department of Public Health's Web site at www.adph.org under Fast Find/Health Statistics.

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