



Heart Disease, Stroke Deaths Down, Yet Still Kill More in U.S. Than Any Other Cause

Together, heart disease and stroke accounted for more than a quarter of all deaths in the United States in 2023.

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Highlights:

- According to the American Heart Association's 2026 Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics Update, heart disease remains the leading cause of death in the U.S. and stroke has moved up to the #4 spot.
- Together, heart disease and stroke accounted for more than a quarter of all deaths in the U.S. in 2023, the most recent year for which data is available.
- Cardiovascular diseases, including all types of heart disease and stroke, claim more lives in the U.S. each year than all forms of cancer and accidental deaths — the #2 and #3 causes of death — combined.

Dallas — Following a five-year upward trend likely impacted by the COVID pandemic, the number of heart disease and stroke deaths has declined, yet, heart disease and stroke still kill more people in the U.S. each year than any other cause, according to data reported in the [2026 Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics: A Report of U.S. and Global Data From the American Heart Association](#).

Together, heart disease (22% of U.S. deaths) — the leading cause of death for more than a century — and stroke (5.3% of U.S. deaths) — now replacing COVID as the 4th leading cause of death — accounted for more than a quarter of all deaths in the U.S. in 2023, the latest year for which data is available. The annual update published today in [Circulation](#), the peer-reviewed, flagship journal of the American Heart Association, a global force changing the future of health for all.

The overall deaths from heart disease and stroke continue to decline with fewer total deaths and

modest improvements in the age-adjusted death rate. Age-adjusted death is a way to compare death rates fairly by removing the effect of different age structures in populations.

Some key statistics from the report include:

- In 2023, there were 915,973 total deaths from [cardiovascular disease](#) (CVD), including [heart disease](#), stroke, hypertension and heart failure, down from 941,652 CVD deaths in 2022. The age-adjusted rate of CVD deaths in 2023 was 218.3 per 100,000 people, compared with 224.3 per 100,000 in 2022.
 - On average, every 34 seconds, someone died of CVD in 2023.
- Coronary heart disease (the most common form of CVD and impacts the arteries of the heart often leading to a heart attack) was the underlying cause for 349,470 U.S. deaths in 2023, down from 371,506 deaths in 2022.
 - On average, about 2 people died of heart disease every 3 minutes in the U.S. in 2023.
- Stroke was the underlying cause for 162,639 U.S. deaths in 2023, down from 165,393 deaths in 2022.
 - On average in 2023, someone died of stroke every 3 minutes and 14 seconds in the U.S.

“It’s encouraging to see that total deaths from heart disease and stroke declined. The past five years appear to have been an anomaly given the huge impact the pandemic had on all health during that time,” said Stacey E. Rosen, MD, FAHA, volunteer president of the American Heart Association and senior vice president of women’s health and executive director of the Katz Institute for Women’s Health of Northwell Health in New York City. “The fact remains that heart disease and stroke continue to take the lives of too many of our loved ones each and every day. Together, they still kill more people than the #2 and #3 causes of death which include all types of cancer and accidents combined.”

When looking at ranking, stroke now sits at the #4 spot on the list of leading causes of death correlating with the fact that COVID deaths dropped from that spot to #10. While the total number of stroke deaths dropped for the first time in several years, an increase in stroke deaths among the youngest and oldest populations remains a major health concern:

- There was an 8.3% increase in the crude stroke death rate among people 25 to 34 years of age between 2013 and 2023, a significant contrast to no increase in that rate between 2012 and 2022.

- There was an 18.2% increase in the crude stroke death rate among people older than 85 years of age between 2013 and 2023, up from a 12.1% increase between 2012 and 2022.

“The good news is that, overall, fewer people are dying from any cause, and death rates are improving as life expectancy continues to rebound after the COVID-19 pandemic,” said American Heart Association volunteer chair of the statistics update writing committee Latha P. Palaniappan, MD, MS, FAHA, a professor of cardiovascular medicine at Stanford University in Palo Alto, California. “However, about half of all U.S. adults continue to have some form of cardiovascular disease. Those rates are still higher than they were before the pandemic and persistent increases in common conditions like high blood pressure, diabetes and obesity continue to drive the risk.”

Palaniappan said the growing prevalence of these health conditions that contribute to stroke and to overall cardiovascular disease continues to be worrisome. Comparing data from 2017 to 2020 with data from 2021 to 2023:

- About 125.9 million (47.3%) U.S. adults now have high blood pressure, compared to 122.4 million (46.7%) people previously.
- Nearly 29.5 million U.S. adults have diagnosed diabetes, compared to 29.3 million people previously.
- About 50% of U.S. adults have obesity or severe obesity, and while that’s slightly lower than 51.1% previously, an alarming increase in obesity and severe obesity was seen in youth 2 to 19 years of age over this time — from 25.4% previously to 28.1% now.

These health factors not only contribute to heart disease and stroke, they also lead to other complications. Because of the interconnectivity of these conditions, for the first time this year’s Statistics Update includes a chapter on [cardiovascular-kidney-metabolic \(CKM\) syndrome](#), a health disorder made up of connections between heart disease, kidney disease, diabetes and obesity, leading to poor health outcomes. CKM syndrome is identified by the presence of risk factors including high blood pressure, high triglycerides, abnormal cholesterol, high blood glucose (sugar), impaired kidney function and elevated weight or obesity. Data from this year’s report shows:

- Nearly 90% of U.S. adults have some level of CKM syndrome and
- Over 80% of U.S. young and middle-aged adults already show early CKM risk.

“These numbers should ring alarm bells, particularly among young adults because that’s a snapshot into our future,” said Sadiya S. Khan, MD, MSs, FAHA, volunteer vice-chair of the statistical update writing group the Magerstadt Professor of Cardiovascular Epidemiology and an associate professor of cardiology and preventive medicine at Northwestern’s Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago. “Overall projections for these health conditions show increases expected on

nearly every level in the next few decades. Even though these rising numbers can feel discouraging, the advances in our diagnostic and therapeutic arsenal provide hope. We can detect warning signs before events occur and we now have many tools to prevent events. Prevention is our most powerful way to have the greatest impact and the more we use it, and the sooner we use it, the more lives we can save.”

A number of studies cited in the Statistics Update note that following the American Heart Association’s [Life’s Essential 8](#) healthy lifestyle guidance can make inroads preventing heart disease and stroke and improving [brain health](#). Life’s Essential 8 is a set of four health behaviors (eat better, be more active, quit tobacco and get healthy sleep) and four health factors (manage weight, control cholesterol, manage blood sugar and manage blood pressure) that are key measures for improving and maintaining cardiovascular health. Adherence to the measures determines a cardiovascular health score ranging from ideal, to moderate to low.

“There is a growing body of scientific evidence that shows following these eight measures can dramatically reduce the overall burden of cardiovascular disease. We were very encouraged by the findings of many of those studies featured in this year’s Statistics Update,” Palaniappan said.

Those reported findings include:

- A review of 59 studies from 2010 to 2022 found that people who had ideal cardiovascular health as measured by Life’s Essential 8 had a 74% lower risk of cardiovascular events compared with those who had poor cardiovascular health.
- In the United States, optimal Life’s Essential 8 scores could prevent up to 40% of annual all-cause and CVD deaths among adults.
- Better cardiovascular health was also associated with better brain health including younger brain age, less subclinical vascular disease, slower cognitive decline, and reduced dementia risk. For example, in a meta-analysis of 14 studies, a 1-point improvement in cardiovascular health was associated with a 6% lower rate of dementia and the negative impact of poor cardiovascular health was more pronounced for midlife than later in life. Vascular risk factors are increasingly recognized as the most important cluster of risk factors for brain health, particularly because of their high prevalence and potential for modification.

Palaniappan noted that, unfortunately, data continues to show poor adherence to Life’s Essential 8 measures:

- Diet scores are the lowest of the eight measures among adults and youth.
- Only 1 in 4 (25.3%) of U.S. adults meet national physical activity guidelines. Only 1 in 5 (19.5%)

U.S. youths 6 to 17 years of age are physically active for 60 minutes or more every day of the week.

- Overall cigarette smoking rates appear on a decline; however, e-cigarettes are now the most used tobacco products in youths: 18.1% of high school (2.84 million) students in the U.S. report using e-cigarettes. Among middle and high school students who currently use e-cigarettes, 26.3% reported daily use.
- Less than half (43.5%) of U.S. adults being treated for Type 2 diabetes have their condition under control.

“We know that as much as 80% of heart disease and stroke is preventable with lifestyle changes and many chronic health conditions that contribute to poor cardiovascular health are manageable,” Rosen said. “Improving your cardiovascular health is possible. However, it will take a concerted effort. The data provided in the Statistics Update may look like just numbers to many, but to the American Heart Association, they are lives on the line. We hope this information provides an impetus and our programs and resources serve as a guide for communities to unite for change and for individuals to take personal action. As an Association, we will continue to be a catalyst for transformation in improving the health and wellbeing of everyone, everywhere.”

Since 1927, the Association has produced the annual statistics update as a resource for understanding the true impact of cardiovascular disease and brain health — who it affects most, where it strikes hardest and which factors drive risk.

“The American Heart Association is the leading non-profit funder of heart disease and stroke research worldwide and this knowledge is essential if we are to change the future of cardiovascular research.

Additionally, this annual statistics update has become a preeminent resource for shaping awareness efforts and informing policy to address the growing burden of cardiovascular disease and the risk factors that drive that,” said American Heart Association CEO Nancy Brown. “As the world’s leading cause of death, cardiovascular disease demands global attention, and the insights uncovered in this report help steer the Association’s lifesaving work around the world.”

This statistics update was prepared by a volunteer writing group on behalf of the American Heart Association Council on Epidemiology and Prevention Statistics Committee and Stroke Statistics Committee. Additional author names and authors’ disclosures are listed in the manuscript.

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