US death rate dropped 6% in 2023, with Covid-19 falling to 10th leading cause of death, CDC says

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Heart disease, cancer and unintentional injury were the leading causes of death in the US last year, according to provisional data from the CDC. HRAUN/E+/Getty Images

(CNN) — A steep drop in Covid-19 deaths helped the overall death rate in the United States fall 6% in 2023, according to provisional data published Thursday by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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The US death rate has been dropping quickly since reaching a pandemic-high of about 880 deaths for every 100,000 people in 2021, but this provisional data suggests the death rate is still well above pre-pandemic years. In 2019, there were 715 deaths per 100,000 people, CDC data shows.

As in previous years, heart disease, cancer and unintentional injury – which includes drug overdoses – were the leading causes of death. These top three causes accounted for about half of all deaths last year. Cancer deaths ticked up in 2023 compared with 2022, while deaths from heart disease declined.

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Covid-19 fell from the fourth leading cause of death to the 10th; there were about 76,000 deaths associated with the virus in 2023, down 69% from the more than 245,000 deaths in 2022.

Stroke moved up to the fourth leading cause of death, followed by chronic lower respiratory diseases, Alzheimer's disease, diabetes, kidney disease and liver disease.

Overall death rates fell for all age groups, but the decrease was not as significant among children younger than 5, according to the provisional data.

All racial and ethnic groups also saw death rates decrease last year, but rates remained highest among the Black population. The age-adjusted rate of 924 deaths for 100,000 people was 23% higher than the overall rate. White people were more likely than any other group to die from Covid-19 in 2023.

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As in previous years, the death rate was higher among men than women, but the gap decreased slightly in 2023. There were about 884 deaths for every 100,000 men and 633 for every 100,000 women, the provisional age-adjusted data show.

"Provisional death estimates provide an early indication of shifts in mortality trends and can guide public health policies and interventions intended to reduce mortality among populations experiencing higher mortality," CDC researchers wrote in the new report.

This early data is subject to change, and it may take longer to finalize data from death certificates for certain causes of death or from certain parts of the US.

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