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COVID-19 Deaths — Alaska, January 2020 through September 2021

Introduction

This *Bulletin* characterizes COVID-19 related deaths among Alaska residents from January 1, 2020 through September 30, 2021 by selected demographic characteristics and underlying medical conditions known to be associated with more severe COVID-19 related outcomes.¹

Methods

Death classification methods were consistent with those described in a prior *Bulletin*.² Data on underlying medical conditions were obtained from contact tracers and data analysts during interviews, and hospital record reviews. Following the recent surge in cases, comorbidity data was unavailable for 16% of deaths. For deaths where these were missing, we aimed to supplement data using death certificate review where possible (n=33). Data are preliminary and subject to change.

Results

During January 1, 2020, through September 30, 2021, 109,749 cases of SARS-CoV-2 infection among Alaska residents were reported to the Section of Epidemiology, and 658 deaths were determined to be caused by or associated with COVID-19 (90.3 per 100,000 population). Of those, 397 (60%) were male, 517 (79%) required hospitalization, 244 (37%) were admitted to an intensive care unit (ICU) and 82 (13%) deaths occurred in residents of a licensed long-term care or assisted living facility.

Additional demographic data as well as the vaccine status of decedents can be found in the Alaska Division of Public Health monthly COVID-19 updates.³ Death rates have increased substantially in Alaska following introduction of the Delta variant in June 2021 (Figure 1). Death rates were highest among persons aged ≥80 years (Figure 2).

Figure 1. COVID-19 Death Rates by Month — Alaska, January 2020 through September 2021

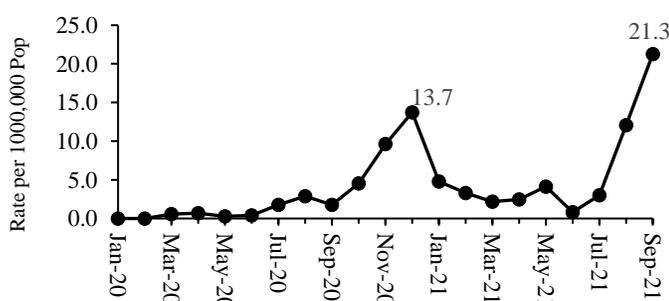
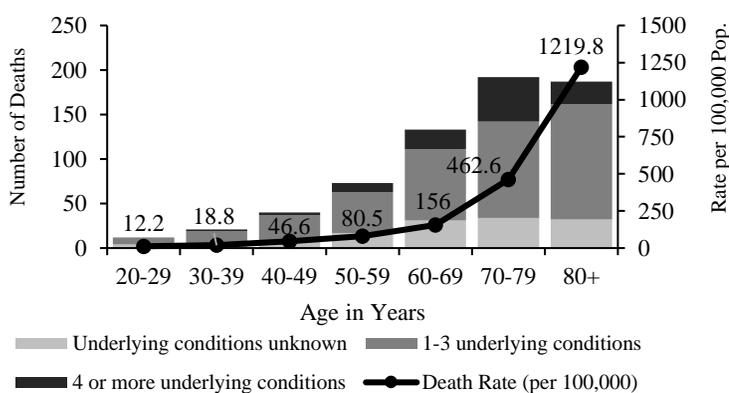


Figure 2. COVID-19 Death Numbers and Rates, and Number of Underlying High-Risk Medical Conditions by Age — Alaska, January 2020 through September 2021



Of the 551 decedents for which past medical history was known, 529 (96%) had at least one underlying medical

condition associated with increased risk for severe COVID-19.¹ Of these, 417 (79%) had 1–3 medical conditions, 106 (20%) had 4–6 medical conditions, and 6 (1%) had ≥7. The most common underlying medical conditions were cardiovascular diseases (including hypertension) (59%), diabetes mellitus (31%) and chronic respiratory diseases (25%) (Table).

Table. Underlying Medical Conditions Documented in COVID-19 Decedents — Alaska, January 2020 through September 2021

Underlying Medical Condition	Deaths (%)
Cardiovascular diseases	325 (59)
Diabetes mellitus	172 (31)
Chronic respiratory diseases	136 (25)
Neurologic conditions and neurodevelopmental disabilities	130 (24)
Chronic renal disease	116 (22)
Smoker (current or former)	100 (18)
Immunocompromised state	95 (17)
Obesity	90 (16)
Others*	110 (20)

Conditions are not mutually exclusive; decedents may have more than one underlying medical condition.

**Includes substance use disorders, mental health conditions, chronic liver disease and pregnancy.*

Discussion

Alaska's COVID-19 death rate increased substantially following introduction of the Delta variant. Alaska's death rates remain highest in males, older adult persons, and those with underlying medical conditions. Chronic cardio-respiratory diseases and diabetes mellitus were the most common underlying medical conditions identified among decedents. Approximately two-thirds (67%) of Alaskan adults are estimated to have underlying health conditions that put them at increased risk of severe COVID-19 illness, including obesity, diabetes, chronic obstructive lung disease, heart disease, chronic kidney disease and current or past smoking.⁴

Strategies to prevent future covid deaths include the following:

- Become fully vaccinated. Alaskans aged ≥5 years are eligible to get vaccinated for COVID-19 now.^{3,5}
- All fully vaccinated persons aged ≥18 years can get a booster dose if ≥2 months or ≥6 months have passed since completion of their Janssen or mRNA series, respectively.⁶
- Prevent and control high-risk medical conditions.⁴
- Evade infection by continuing to wear masks, socially distance, and avoid crowds in public indoor spaces while case counts remain high.

References

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