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Summary of COVID-19 Deaths — Alaska, January 1 through December 31, 2020

Background

This *Bulletin* is an update to the previously published COVID-19 deaths report;¹ it characterizes the COVID-19-related deaths that occurred among Alaska residents from January 1 through December 31, 2020. Additional data are available in the [Alaska Coronavirus Response Hub](#).

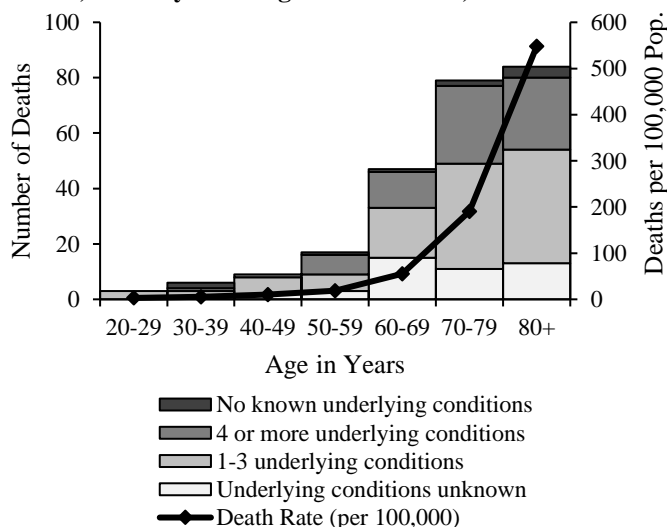
Methods

Methods were consistent with those described in the prior COVID-19 deaths *Bulletin*.^{1,2} All data are preliminary and are congruent with state data displays as of January 25, 2021.

Results

During January 1 through December 31, 2020, 46,045 cases of SARS-CoV-2 infection among Alaska residents were reported to the Section of Epidemiology, and 245 deaths were determined to be caused by or associated with COVID-19. Most (147, 67%) decedents were male. Death rates per 100,000 population were highest among persons aged ≥80 years (548), followed by those aged ≥70 years (190; Figure 1). Of the 200 decedents for whom past medical history was known, 10 (5%) had no underlying medical conditions associated with increased risk for severe COVID-19 in adults,⁴ including two aged 30–39, one aged 50–59, one aged 60–69, two aged 70–79, and four aged 80 and older. One hundred fourteen cases (57%) had 1–3 such conditions, and 76 (38%) had ≥4 such conditions. For comparison, approximately two-thirds of Alaska adults have one or more of these underlying conditions, which include cancer, current or past smoking, diabetes, obesity, chronic kidney disease, chronic heart disease, and others.^{4,5}

Figure 1. COVID-19 Counts and Rate of Deaths by Age and Number of Underlying High-Risk Medical Conditions⁴ — Alaska, January 1 through December 31, 2020



Of the 194 (80%) decedents who had been hospitalized at some point during their illness, the duration of hospitalization ranged from 1–78 days (mean: 11 days, median: 9 days). Of these, 92 (47%) were admitted to an intensive care unit. Most (152, 62%) deaths occurred in November and December when monthly counts of new confirmed cases were also at their peak (Figure 2). Illness duration was calculated as the difference between date of illness onset or specimen collection date and date of death and ranged from 0–130 days (mean: 16 days, median: 12 days). Mortality rates were highest among Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islanders (NHOPI) and American Indian/Alaska Native people (AI/AN), followed by Asian and Black populations (Table).

Figure 2. COVID-19 Counts of Cases and Deaths by Month — Alaska, January 1 through December 31, 2020

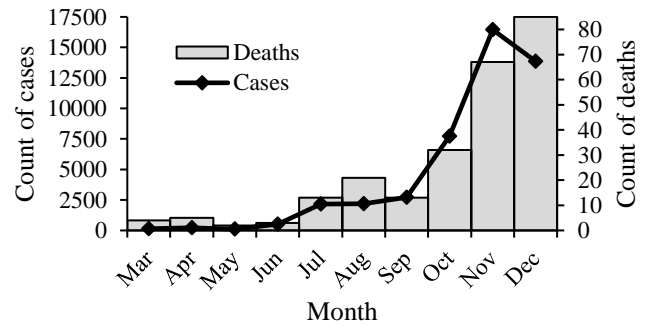


Table. COVID-19 Deaths by Race and Ethnicity — Alaska, January 1 through December 31, 2020

Race	Deaths # (%)	Rate per 100,000 population
AI/AN	90 (37%)	79.1
Asian	28 (11%)	58.4
Black	9 (4%)	33.5
NHOPI	15 (6%)	141.5
White	100 (41%)	21.0
Multiple races	2 (1%)	3.6
Hispanic (of any race)	10 (4%)	18.9
Race unknown	1 (<1%)	n/a
Ethnicity unknown	3 (1%)	n/a

Since the previous summary, the mortality rates per 100,000 population increased in all regions but most markedly in rural areas. Death rates were highest for the Anchorage/Mat-Su (39.1) and Southwest (37.8) regions, followed by Gulf Coast (34.5), Interior (25.4), Southeast (12.4), and Northern (10.9).

Discussion

During 2020, Alaska’s COVID-19 death rate was less than one-third the national rate (34 vs. 104 deaths per 100,000 population, respectively).⁶ However, since the prior summary in mid-October, Alaska’s overall COVID-19 death count nearly quadrupled and rates increased in all geographics areas, all age ranges, and all racial and ethnic categories. Death rates were highest among males, older adults, persons with underlying medical conditions, residents of the Anchorage/Mat-Su and Southwest regions, and members of the NHOPI and AI/AN populations (with notable increases in rural Alaska Native populations late in the year). This information can be used to help guide Alaska’s ongoing COVID-19 response efforts. Ongoing vigilance is needed to further reduce SARS-CoV-2 transmission in Alaska to prevent further COVID-19 deaths.

References

1. State of Alaska. *Epidemiology Bulletin*. Summary of COVID-19 deaths—Alaska, January 1 through October 15, 2020. Available at http://www.epi.alaska.gov/bulletins/docs/b2020_13.pdf
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4. CDC. Certain Medical Conditions and Risk for Severe COVID-19 Illness. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html>
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6. CDC. COVID Data Tracker. Available at: <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#demographics>