


An Update on Cancer Deaths in the United States

CANCER DEATHS IN THE UNITED STATES

Cancer death rates dropped 27% from 2001 to 2020.

27%



cdc.gov/cancer

Cancer death rates dropped 27% in the United States from 2001 to 2020. [See more images to share.](#)

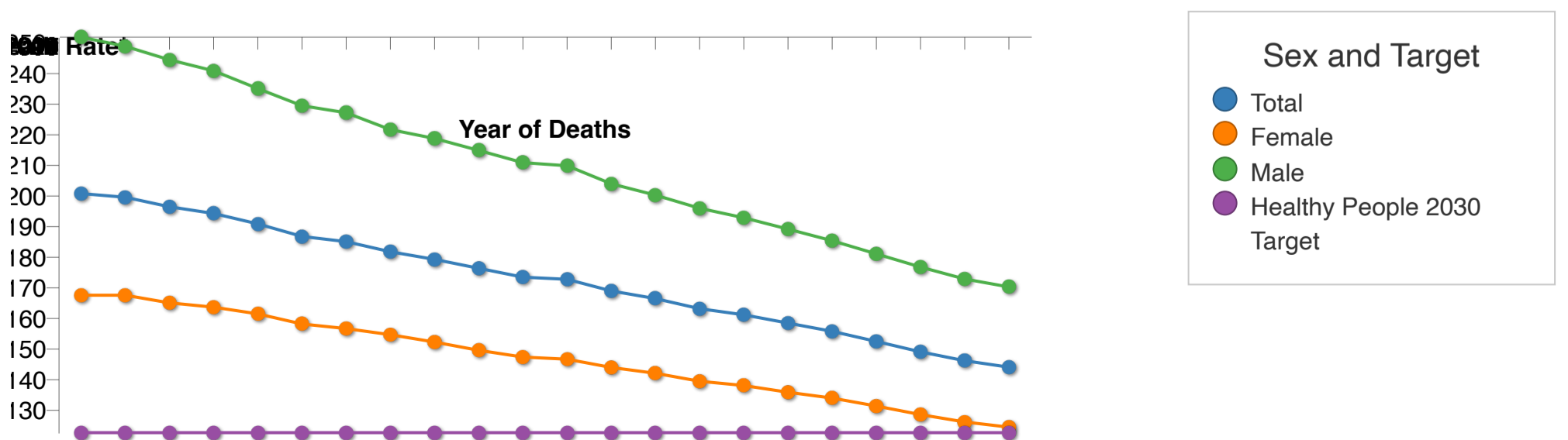
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Cancer was the second leading cause of death, after heart disease, in the United States in 2020. In 2020, there were 602,350 cancer deaths; 284,619 were among females and 317,731 among males.

Is cancer increasing or decreasing?

In the past 20 years, from 2001 to 2020, cancer death rates went down 27%, from 196.5 to 144.1 deaths per 100,000 population. *Healthy People 2030* set an [objective of 122.7 cancer deaths](#) per 100,000 population. Cancer death rates went down more among males (30%) than among females (25%) but were still higher among males (170.3 deaths per 100,000 population) than females (124.5 deaths per 100,000 population).

Figure 1. Age-adjusted cancer death rates, by sex, United States, 1999–2020



*Deaths per 100,000 standard population. Please note that, due to graphing limitations, the y-axis starts at 122.7.

Sex and Target	1999	2000	2001	2002
Total	200.8	199.6	196.5	194.3
Female	167.6	167.6	165.1	163.7
Male	251.9	248.9	244.5	240.9
Healthy People 20...	122.7	122.7	122.7	122.7

NOTES: Deaths were classified using the International Classification of Diseases, 10th Revision. Cancer deaths were identified using underlying cause-of-death codes C00-C97 (malignant neoplasms). Rates were age-adjusted to the 2000 US standard population. [Healthy People objectives](#) are available.

[Download Data \(CSV\)](#)

SOURCE: National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System, Mortality Data.

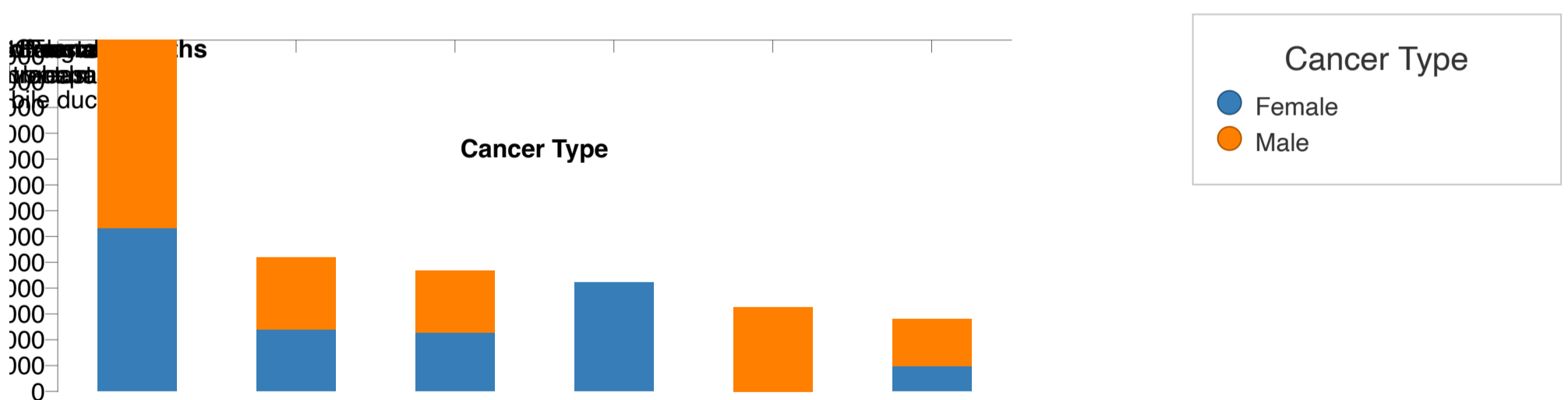
What were the leading causes of cancer death in 2020?

Lung cancer was the leading cause of cancer death, accounting for 23% of all cancer deaths. Other common causes of cancer death were cancers of the colon and rectum (9%), pancreas (8%), female breast (7%), prostate (5%), and liver and intrahepatic bile duct (5%). Other cancers individually accounted for less than 5% of cancer deaths.

In 2020—

- 136,084 people died of lung cancer (63,135 females and 72,949 males).
- 51,869 people died of colorectal cancer (23,826 females and 28,043 males).
- 46,774 people died of pancreatic cancer (22,495 females and 24,279 males).
- 42,275 females died of breast cancer.
- 32,707 males died of prostate cancer.
- 28,227 people died of liver and intrahepatic bile duct cancer (9,591 females and 18,636 males).

Figure 2. Number of deaths by leading cancer types and sex, United States, 2020



Cancer Type	1. Lung and bronchus	2. Colon and rectum	3. Pancreas	4. Female breast
Female	63135	23826	22495	42275
Male	72949	28043	24279	

NOTES: Deaths were classified using the International Classification of Diseases, 10th Revision. Cancer deaths were identified using underlying cause-of-death codes C00-C97 (malignant neoplasms).

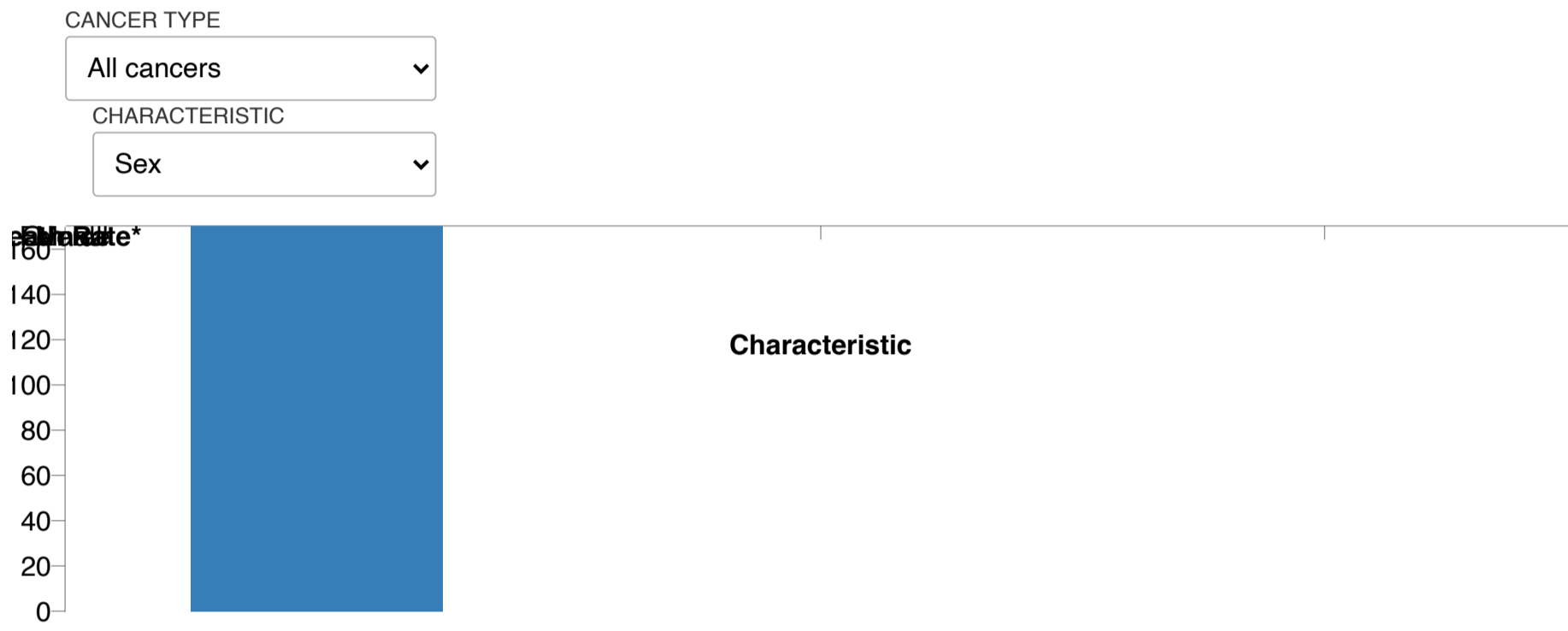
[Download Data \(CSV\)](#)

SOURCE: National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System, Mortality Data.

Do some groups experience higher rates than others?

Cancer death rates differed by cancer type, sex, racial and ethnic group, and residence in an urban or rural county. *Healthy People 2030* objectives include reducing death rates for [lung cancer](#) to 25.1 deaths per 100,000 population, [colorectal cancer](#) to 8.9 deaths per 100,000 population, [female breast cancer](#) to 15.3 deaths per 100,000 female population, and [prostate cancer](#) to 16.9 deaths per 100,000 male population.

Figure 3. Age-adjusted cancer death rates, by leading cancer types and characteristics, United States, 2020



*Deaths per 100,000 standard population

Data Table			
	Overall	Female	Male
● Rate	144.1	124.5	170.3

[Full Data Table for Figure 3](#)

Data table for [Figure 3](#). Age-adjusted cancer death rates, by characteristics and cancer type: United States, 2019

Characteristic	All cancers	Lung cancer	Colon and rectum cancer	Female breast cancer	Prostate cancer	Pancreatic cancer
Overall	144	31.8	12.6	19.1	18.5	11.1
Female	125	26.9	10.5	19.1		9.6
Male	170	38.1	15.1		18.5	12.7

Characteristic	All cancers	Lung cancer	Colon and rectum cancer	Female breast cancer	Prostate cancer	Pancreatic cancer
American Indian/Alaska Native, non-Hispanic	122	26.7	13.1	13.7	12.8	8.8
Asian/Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic	91	18.5	8.9	11.4	8.8	7.6
Black, non-Hispanic	167	33.4	16.7	26.4	36.5	13.4
White, non-Hispanic	150	34.9	12.6	19.4	17.6	11.3
Hispanic	104	14.1	10.3	13.1	14.2	8.7
Rural	164	40.6	15.1	19.9	19.4	11.5
Urban	140	30.2	12.2	19	18.3	11.0

NOTES: Deaths were classified using the International Classification of Diseases, 10th Revision. Cancer deaths were identified using underlying cause-of-death codes C00-C97 (malignant neoplasms). Rates were age-adjusted to the 2000 US standard population. Urban/rural status was based on county of residence, classified using the [2013 NCHS Urban-Rural Classification Scheme for Counties](#). [Healthy People objectives](#) are available.

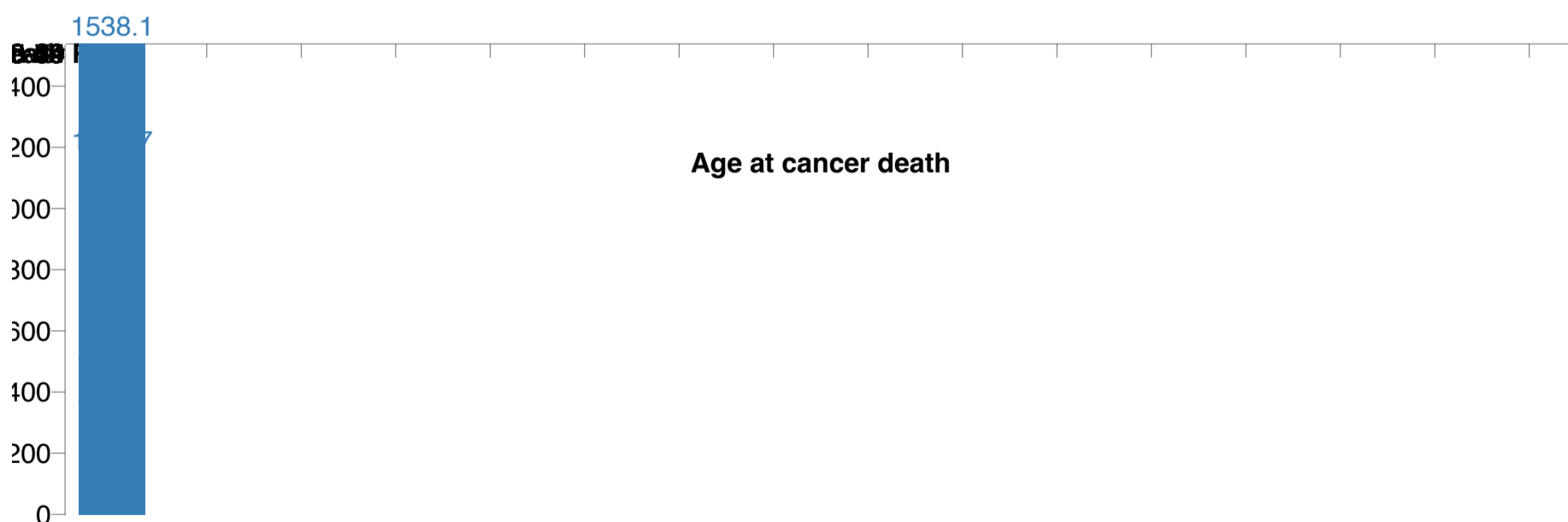
SOURCE: National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System, Mortality Data.

In 2020—

- 1,153 children younger than 15 years old died of cancer.
- 8,863 adolescents and young adults between 15 and 39 years old died of cancer.
- 151,578 adults between 40 and 64 years old died of cancer.
- 338,340 adults between 65 and 84 years old died of cancer.
- 102,413 adults who were 85 years old or older died of cancer.

Note: Age was not recorded for 3 cancer deaths.

Figure 4. Age-specific cancer death rates, United States, 2020



*Deaths per 100,000 population

Data Table



	Less than 15	15-19	20-24	25-29
● Rate	1.9	2.6	3.5	5.5

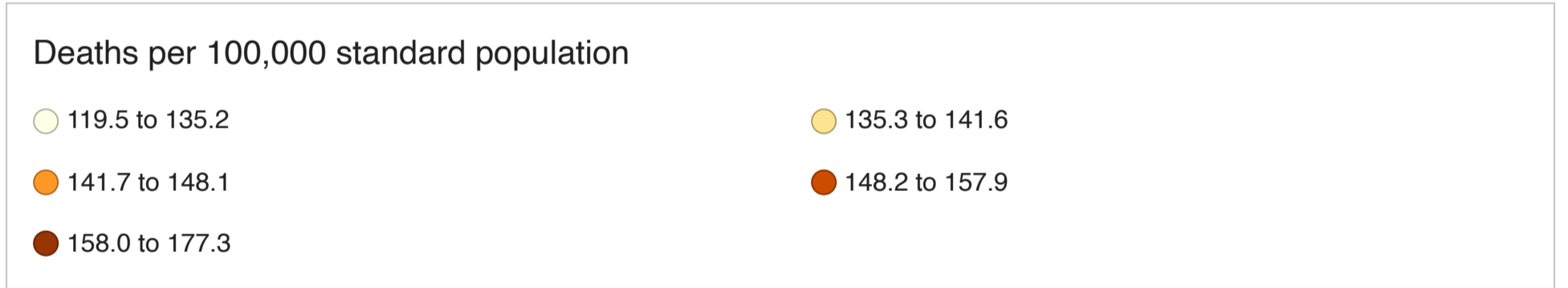
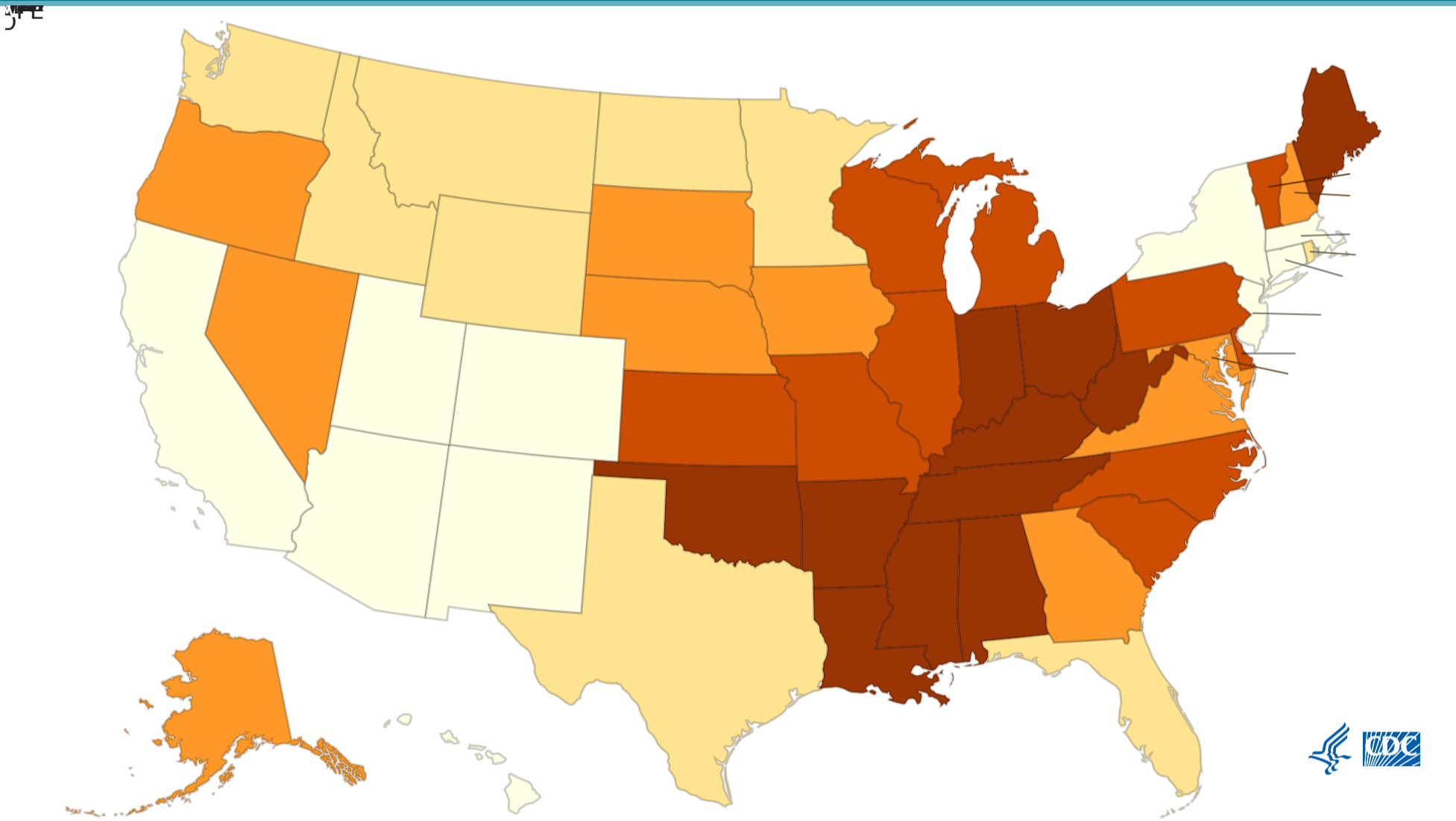
NOTES: Deaths were classified using the International Classification of Diseases, 10th Revision. Cancer deaths were identified using underlying cause-of-death codes C00-C97 (malignant neoplasms).

[Download Data \(CSV\)](#)

SOURCE: National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System, Mortality Data.

By state, the death rate for all cancers combined ranged from 119.5 to 177.3 per 100,000 standard population.

Figure 5. Age-adjusted cancer death rates, by state, United States, 2020



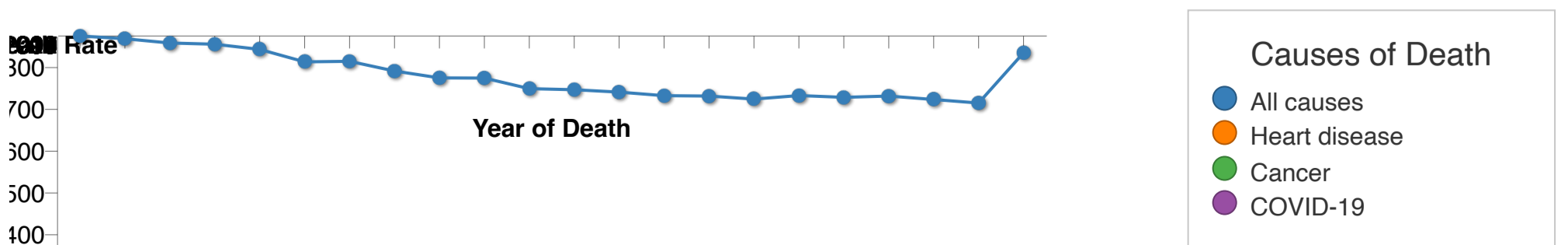
Data Table +

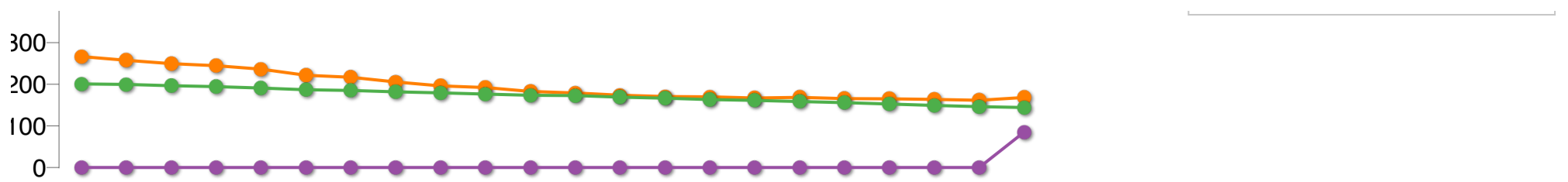
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NOTES: Deaths were classified using the International Classification of Diseases, 10th Revision. Cancer deaths were identified using underlying cause-of-death codes C00-C97 (malignant neoplasms). Rates were age-adjusted to the 2000 US standard population.

SOURCE: National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System, Mortality Data.

Figure 6. Age-adjusted death rates, by cause of death, United States, 1999–2020





*Deaths per 100,000 standard population

Data Table				
Cause of Death	1999	2000	2001	2002
All causes	875.6	869	858.8	855.9
Heart disease	266.5	257.6	249.5	244.6
Cancer	200.8	199.6	196.5	194.3
COVID-19				

NOTES: Deaths were classified using the International Classification of Diseases, 10th Revision. Cancer deaths were identified using underlying cause-of-death codes C00-C97 (malignant neoplasms). Heart disease deaths were identified using underlying cause-of-death codes I00-I09, I11, I13, and I20-I51. COVID-19 deaths were identified using underlying cause-of-death code U07.1. Rates were age-adjusted to the 2000 US standard population.

[Download Data \(CSV\)](#)

SOURCE: National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System, Mortality Data.

In 2020—

- 103 children younger than 15 years died of COVID-19.
- 5,022 adolescents and young adults between 15 to 39 years died of COVID-19.
- 62,866 adults between 40 to 64 years died of COVID-19.
- 173,307 adults between 65 to 84 years died of COVID-19.
- 109,529 adults who were 85 years or older died of COVID-19.

Note: Age was not recorded for 4 COVID-19 deaths.

Why did cancer death rates change from 1999 to 2019?

Previous research suggests that trends in cancer death rates reflect population changes in cancer risk factors, screening test use, diagnostic practices, and treatment advances. [Fact Sheet: President Biden Reignites Cancer Moonshot to End Cancer as We Know It](#) highlights several examples that contributed to this progress—

- **Targeted public health tobacco prevention and control campaigns and new, more effective approaches to smoking cessation.** For more information and quitting resources, visit [Tips From Former Smokers®](#).
- **Cancer vaccines** to prevent viruses (like hepatitis B virus and human papillomavirus) that can lead to cancer. For more information, visit [Vaccines \(Shots\)](#).
- **Cancer screening tests** that find cancer early, when treatment works best. Screening tests for colorectal and cervical cancers can also find precancers, which can be removed before they become cancerous. CDC supports screening for breast, cervical, colorectal, and lung cancers as recommended by the US Preventive Services Task Force. For more information, visit [Cancer Screening Tests](#).
- **New cancer treatments** that target specific mutations or use our immune system to find and kill cancer cells. For more information, visit the National Cancer Institute's [Types of Cancer Treatment](#).

What is CDC doing to reduce cancer deaths?

CDC's framework to reduce cancer deaths includes eliminating preventable cancers, ensuring that all people get the right screening at the right time, and helping cancer survivors live longer, healthier lives. CDC supports foundational programs that aim to reduce the cancer burden through multi-disciplinary collaboration and coordination. These programs include the [National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program](#), the [Colorectal Cancer Control Program](#), the [National Program of Cancer Registries](#), and the [National Comprehensive Cancer Control Program](#). Visit [CDC's Cancer Prevention and Control website](#) for more information.

Data source and methods

The data shown in this report reflect information collected by CDC's [National Center for Health Statistics](#) from death certificates filed in all 50 states and the District of Columbia and compiled into the [National Vital Statistics System](#). Deaths were classified using the International Classification of Diseases, 10th Revision. Cancer deaths were identified using underlying cause-of-death codes C00-C97 (malignant neoplasms). Heart disease deaths were identified using underlying cause-of-death codes I00-I09, I11, I13, and I20-I51. COVID-19 deaths were identified using underlying cause-of-death code U07.1. Rates were age-adjusted to the 2000 US standard population.

Suggested citation

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