

Even though the overall deaths from heart disease continue to decline, heart disease and stroke still top the list of leading causes of death in the U.S., according to the American Heart Association's 2026, Heart-Disease and Stroke Statistics Update. Published January 21, 2026

The overall deaths from heart disease and stroke continue to decline with fewer total deaths and modest improvements in the age-adjusted death rate. 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, heart disease and stroke still kill more people than the #2 and #3 causes of death which include all types of cancer and accidents combined."

"It's encouraging to see that total deaths from heart disease and stroke declined in 2025. 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, M.D., M.S., 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."

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.

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 healthy lifestyle guidance, Life's Essential 8 can make inroads in preventing heart disease. 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.