

More premature deaths in Calaveras compared to state norms

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Calaveras County has a higher rate of premature deaths due to motor vehicle crashes, drug overdoses and cancer when compared to state and national averages, according to information released Friday by the Public Health Division of the Calaveras Health and Human Services Agency.

However, the county's rates of cerebrovascular disease (stroke) and female breast cancer are lower in comparison to state averages.

This information came out as the Division of Public Health announced a new online "Mortality Dashboard" has been posted online to provide residents with information on the leading causes of preventable death in the county such as cancer, heart disease, injuries, chronic lower respiratory disease, stroke and others.

The Mortality Dashboard can be found online at

<https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/public.health/viz/CalaverasCountyHealthIndicators-MortalityCause/Dashboard>.

"Rural counties like ours face unique health challenges and disparities compared to urban areas," said Calaveras County Health Officer, Rene Ramirez. "By making this local mortality data easily accessible, we aim to raise awareness of the major health issues impacting our community and inform efforts to save lives through focused prevention and intervention strategies."

How does Calaveras County compare?

Using data from the California Department of Public Health's County Health Status Profiles 2023, rates of premature death from various causes in Calaveras County were compared to state averages.

Here's what was found: Calaveras County's rate of deaths due to accidents (unintentional injuries) is 64.7 out of 100,000 people, which is higher than California's average (43.4).

Premature deaths from motor vehicle crashes are a major contributor, with a rate of 30.6 per 100,000 in Calaveras County compared to 10.7 statewide. This makes the rate of deaths from motor vehicle crashes in Calaveras nearly three times higher than that of California's.

Calaveras County has higher rates of early death from chronic liver disease/cirrhosis (21.7 vs. 13.8).

Drug overdose deaths occur at a rate of 26.6 per 100,000 in Calaveras County, which is more than 20 percent higher than the state average.

What is driving these trends?

Several factors likely contribute to this county's high rates of premature death from unintentional injuries, liver disease and suicide.

Motor vehicle accidents: Many winding, rural roads with limited safety features. Long commutes. Impaired and distracted driving.

Chronic Liver Disease/ Cirrhosis: High rates of heavy drinking and alcohol use disorders. Progression of hepatitis C in older adults.

Suicide and drug overdoses: Increased accessibility to firearms and opioids. Limited access to mental health and substance abuse treatment. Economic distress and social isolation among older adults in remote areas.

What can the public do?

Preventing early deaths starts with each of us making healthy choices, according to the Public Health division.

Here are some of the ways that you can prevent injury or death:

Always wear a seatbelt, don't speed, and avoid distractions while driving.

Practice safe storage of firearms, medications, and other lethal means.

Reach out for help if you're struggling with mental health or substance abuse.

"Behind these numbers are real people – our friends, family, and neighbors," Dr. Ramirez said. "So many of these early deaths can be prevented with the right interventions, policies and health education. The Mortality Dashboard is an important tool to guide our prevention work."

For more information on the county's health promotion and disease prevention programs, visit <https://publichealth.calaverasgov.us/>.