

Deaths from gastroenteritis doubles

March 14 2012

The number of people who died from gastroenteritis (inflammation of the stomach and intestines that causes vomiting and diarrhea) more than doubled from 1999 to 2007. The findings of this study will be presented today at the International Conference on Emerging Infectious Diseases in Atlanta.

CDC scientists used data from the National Center for Health Statistics to identify gastroenteritis-associated deaths that occurred from 1999 to 2007. The study describes the trends and causes of gastroenteritis-associated deaths among all [age groups](#) in the United States.

"Gastroenteritis is very common, but can be very serious," said lead author Aron Hall, M.D., of the CDC's Division of [Viral Diseases](#). "By knowing the causes of gastroenteritis-associated deaths and who's at risk, we can develop better treatments and prevent people from getting sick."

Over the eight-year study period, gastroenteritis-associated deaths from all causes increased by 10,000—from nearly 7,000 to more than 17,000 per year. Adults over 65 years old accounted for 83 percent of deaths. *Clostridium difficile* (*C. difficile*) and norovirus were the most common infectious causes of gastroenteritis-associated deaths.

There was a five-fold increase—from approximately 2,700 to 14,500 deaths per year—for *C. difficile*. *C. difficile*, a type of bacteria often associated with health care settings that causes diarrhea, accounted for two-thirds of the deaths.

Norovirus was associated with about 800 deaths annually, though there were 50 percent more deaths in years when epidemics were caused by new strains of the virus. Norovirus is highly contagious. It spreads through person-to-person contact and contaminated food, water, and surfaces. People can get norovirus illness throughout the year. Norovirus causes more than 20 million illnesses annually, and it is the leading cause of gastroenteritis outbreaks in the United States.

"While *C. difficile* continues to be the leading contributor to gastroenteritis-associated deaths, this study shows for the first time that norovirus is likely the second leading infectious cause" said Hall. "Our findings highlight the need for effective measures to prevent, diagnose, and manage gastroenteritis, especially for *C. difficile* and norovirus among the elderly."

Provided by American Society for Microbiology

Citation: Deaths from gastroenteritis doubles (2012, March 14) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-03-deaths-gastroenteritis.html>

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