

# With death rate up, US life expectancy is likely down again

May 23 2018, by Mike Stobbe

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In this Aug. 9, 2017 file photo, workers dig a new grave at a church cemetery in New Vienna, Iowa. Preliminary data released on Wednesday, May 23, 2018 shows U.S. death rates rose again last year, indicating that 2017 likely will mark the third straight decline in American life expectancy. (Dave Kettering/Telegraph Herald via AP)

The U.S. death rate rose last year, and 2017 likely will mark the third

straight year of decline in American life expectancy, according to preliminary data.

Death rates rose for Alzheimer's [disease](#), diabetes, flu and pneumonia, and three other leading causes of death, according to numbers posted online Wednesday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Full-year data is not yet available for drug overdoses, suicides or firearm deaths. But partial-year statistics in those categories showed continuing increases.

Just as important, there was little change in the death rate from the nation's No. 1 killer: heart disease. In the past, steady annual drops in heart disease death rates offset increases in other causes. But that offset is no longer happening, experts say.

The CDC's National Center for Health Statistics calculated the preliminary rates based on a first-pass review of death certificates filed last year. There typically are delays in the filing of paperwork for causes of death that involve police investigations.

A more complete report is expected around the end of the year, including the number of deaths and a calculation of [life expectancy](#)—the average lifespan based on year of birth, current death trends and other factors.

For decades, [life](#) expectancy increased, rising a few months nearly every year. But 2016 was the second year in a row in U.S. life expectancy fell, a rare event that had occurred only twice before in the last century.

Health officials say there was one three-year decline. That occurred in 1916, 1917 and 1918, a period that included the worst flu pandemic in modern history.

"Looking at these numbers, it seems likely" the nation has just tied that record, said Anne Case, a Princeton University researcher who's done influential work on deaths in middle-aged white Americans from suicides, drug overdose and alcohol abuse.

The overall death rate rose a little less than 1 percent, to about 734 deaths per 100,000 people. The rate dipped slightly in 2016 despite a record number of deaths that year, so its rise in 2017 is more reason to expect life expectancy will worsen, Case said.

There was some good news.

The death rate for cancer, the nation's No. 2 killer, continued to drop. It fell 2 percent from 2016. Death rates from HIV and blood infections also declined.

The heart disease [death](#) rate fell too, but only by 0.3 percent. Experts think the nation's increasing obesity rate is probably a factor in the flattening of heart disease [death rates](#).

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Citation: With death rate up, US life expectancy is likely down again (2018, May 23) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-05-death-life.html>

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