

COVID dropped to 4th leading cause of death in US last year

May 4 2023, by Mike Stobbe



A man walks through the snow covered Mount Lebanon Cemetery in Mount Lebanon, Pa., on Monday, Jan. 23, 2023. U.S. deaths fell in 2022, as COVID-19 fatalities dropped by half from 2021 and the coronavirus dropped from being the nation's third leading cause of death to the fourth. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported the 2022 numbers on Thursday, May 4, 2023, cautioning that they are preliminary and may change a little after further analysis. Credit: AP Photo/Gene J. Puskar, File

U.S. deaths fell last year, and COVID-19 dropped to the nation's No. 4 cause, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported Thursday.

COVID-19 deaths trailed those caused by heart disease, [cancer](#) and injuries such as drug overdoses, motor vehicle fatalities and shootings. In 2020 and 2021, only heart disease and cancer were ahead of the coronavirus.

U.S. deaths usually rise year-to-year, in part because the nation's population has been growing. The pandemic accelerated that trend, making 2021 the deadliest in U.S. history, with more than 3.4 million deaths. But 2022 saw the first drop in deaths since 2009.

The 2022 tally was about 3.3 million—a 5% decline from 2021 but still much higher than in the years before the pandemic. The CDC cautioned that last year's numbers are preliminary and may change a little after further analysis.

Coronavirus-associated death rates fell for nearly all Americans. The [virus](#) was deemed the underlying cause of about 187,000 U.S. deaths last year, accounting for about 6% of deaths. The highest COVID-19 death rates were in the South and in an adjacent region that stretches west to Texas, Oklahoma and New Mexico, the CDC said.

The [death rates](#) for [heart disease](#) and cancer increased during the pandemic, the CDC said. The cancer death rate had been falling for 20 years before COVID-19 hit.

The CDC report indicated a slight decline in the number of injury deaths last year, falling to about 218,000 from about 219,500 the year before. That would be a surprise, given recent trends in [rising drug overdose](#) and gun deaths.

CDC officials noted that number could rise. Death certificate data for injury deaths tends to take longer because many involve police investigations.

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