

Falls Morbidity and Mortality in Iowa

2022



Falls were the leading cause of unintentional injury deaths for all ages in Iowa in 2020. The majority of falls in Iowa occur in those ages 65 and older, which resulted in 542 unintentional injury deaths in 2020. This trend can be seen in Figure 1 as adults 65 & Older have the highest rate of fall deaths over time.

Iowa's age-adjusted rates of unintentional fall deaths per 100,000 has been higher than national rates since 2001. For example, in 2020, the rate in Iowa was 95.31 per 100,000 and the overall U.S. rate was 69.64 per 100,000. (CDC's WISQARS)

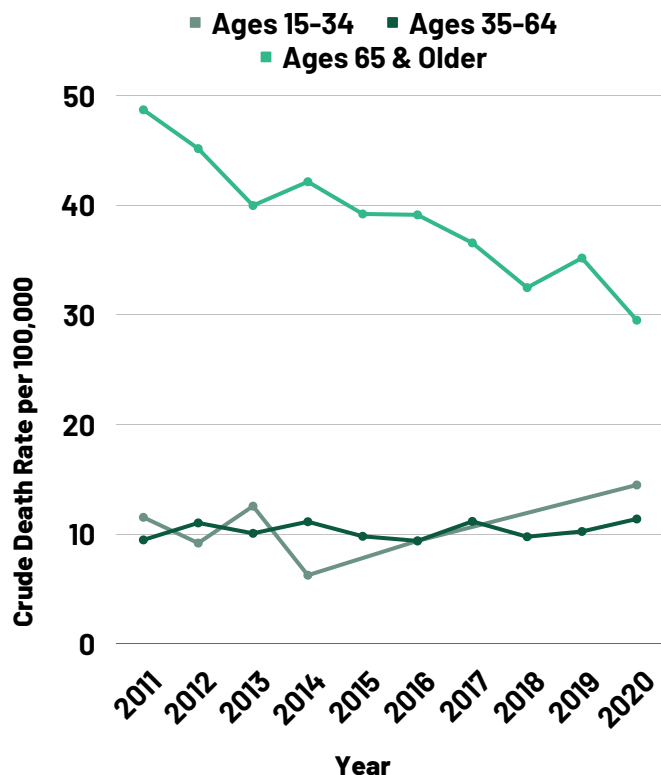


Figure 1. Fall related death crude rates per 100,000 individuals by age group in Iowa years 2011-2020

**To protect an individual's privacy, rates based on counts of 5 or less are suppressed.; this occurs in the 15-34 age group years 2014, 2017, 2018, and 2019

Unintentional injuries result in many hospitalizations and emergency department visits for older adults ages 65 and Older over time as illustrated in Figure 2.

Falls are costly to Iowans in both direct medical costs and indirect costs due to loss of life. In 2019, there were 457 deaths from unintentional falls in the 65 & Older age group. The total medical costs from these deaths was \$12.67 million and the average medical costs (i.e., costs associated with care) per each individual death was \$27,730. (CDC WISQARS)

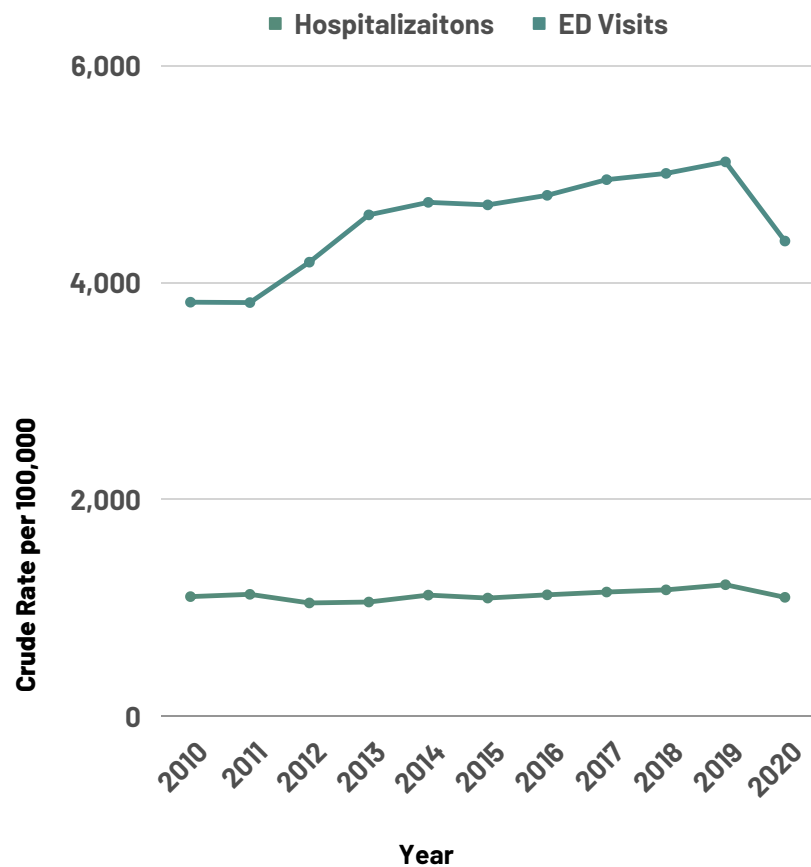


Figure 2. Fall Related Injury hospitalization rates and emergency department (ED) Visits crude rates per 100,000 individuals for ages 65+ in Iowa years 2011-2020

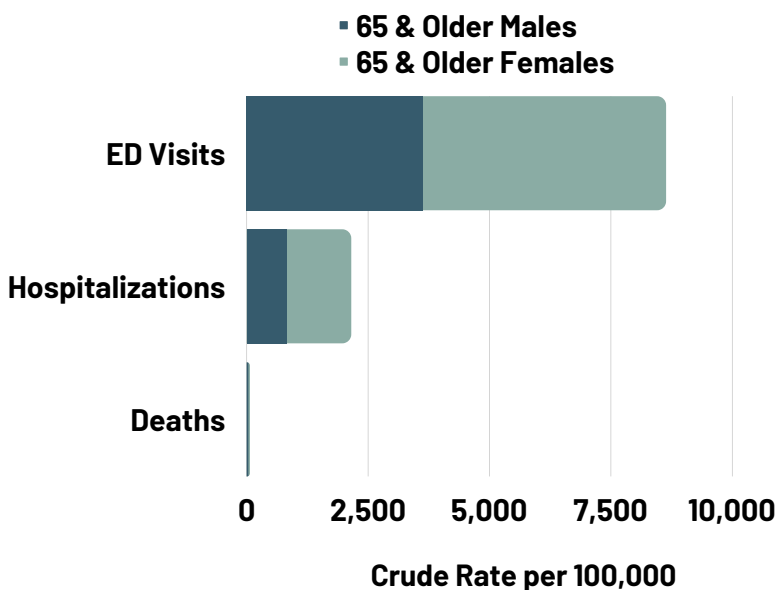


Figure 3 shows that, in 2020, females and males 65 & Older followed similar trends of having more emergency department visits from unintentional fall injuries than hospitalizations or deaths. Females had higher rates of emergency department visits (5,004.15 per 100,000) and hospitalizations (1,326.38 per 100,000), but males had high rates on unintentional fall injury deaths (31.03 per 100,000).

Figure 3. Crude rates per 100,00 individuals of 65 & Older Male and Female Emergency Department (ED) Visits, Hospitalizations, and Deaths in Iowa in 2020

PREVENTION IS POSSIBLE.

Injuries and deaths from falls are preventable. Some important actions to prevent falls in older adults include:

- **Stay physically active.** This will maintain and improve strength and balance while also keeping joints, ligaments, and tendons flexible.
- **Keep bones strong** by staying physically active, consuming a healthy diet with sufficient vitamin D, protein, and calcium, and maintaining a consistent weight.
- **Have eye and hearing tests** as changes in these senses may lead to falls. Ensure the appropriate eyeglasses and hearing aids fit well and are properly worn if needed.
- **Learn about the side effects of medication and review prescriptions** with a doctor or a pharmacist. Some medications may cause sleepiness or dizziness, which increase fall risk.
- **Practice standing up slowly** to reduce sudden changes in blood pressure that increase unsteadiness.
- **Use the appropriate walking assistance device**, such as a walker or a cane, if needed to maintain steadiness when walking. Ensure it is fitted correctly to be the right size and that one knows how to properly use the device.
- **Get enough sleep and reduce alcohol intake** as both increase fall risk by impacting reflexes and balance.
- **Wear appropriate shoes** that reduce falling hazards and support one's feet, such as non-skid, rubber-soled, low-heeled shoes. Take caution to not walk on stairs or floors in socks or smooth-soled slippers/shoes.
- **Maintain caution when walking on slippery or icy surfaces** by walking slowly, wearing supportive and well gripped shoes, and spreading sand or salt on icy areas.
- **Ensure a safer home environment by fall proofing one's home** by reducing tripping hazards and maintaining walkways, especially in the dark, and adding grab bars and railings in bathrooms.
 - Learn how to create a fall-proof home at: [the National Institute of Aging Website](https://www.nia.nih.gov/aging/safe-home)

Resources:

- Iowa Department of Public Health. (n.d.). Fall Related Injuries. Iowa Public Health Tracking Portal. Retrieved March 25, 2022, from <https://tracking.idph.iowa.gov/Health/Injuries/Fall-Related-Injuries>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). WISQARS Cost of Injury. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved March 25, 2022, from <https://wisqars.cdc.gov/cost/?y=2019&o=MORT&i=1&m=20840&q=19&s=3&u=AVG&t=VPSL&a=custom&g1=0&q2=199&a1=65&a2=199&r1=MECH&r2=INTENT&c1=NONE&c2=NONE>

Interested to know more about falls in your county?

[Visit the IDPH tracking portal!](https://www.idph.iowa.gov/Health/Injuries/Fall-Related-Injuries)