

Leading Causes of Death

Mortality rates, which are the number of deaths per population at risk, are used to describe the leading causes of death. Mortality rates provide a measure of magnitude of deaths within a population. However, behaviors and exposures to hazardous agents often take many years to impact health outcomes, like exposure to tobacco smoke and the development of lung cancer. In this report, mortality rates are presented for infants (less than 1 year) and for persons age 65 and over. Deaths occurring between ages 1-64 are presented in the Leading Causes of Premature Death section which follows.

Infant Mortality

In 2001, Georgia had the ninth highest infant mortality rate in the United States with a rate of 8.6 deaths per 1,000 live births (13). Infant mortality rates in DeKalb County have been increasing slightly from 9.9 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1994 to 10.5 in 2002 (Figure 16). From 1994 to 2002, there was an average of 12 black infant deaths per 1,000 live births and 4.7 white infant deaths per 1,000 live births. However, the infant mortality rate of whites increased 84% from 3.5 deaths per 1,000 per live births in 1994 to 6.8 in 2002. Because of small annual numbers of deaths to Asian and Hispanic infants, a detailed analysis of these groups is not possible. Compared to whites and blacks, Asians and Hispanics had the lowest nine-year average infant mortality rates from 1994 to 2002 (Table 10).

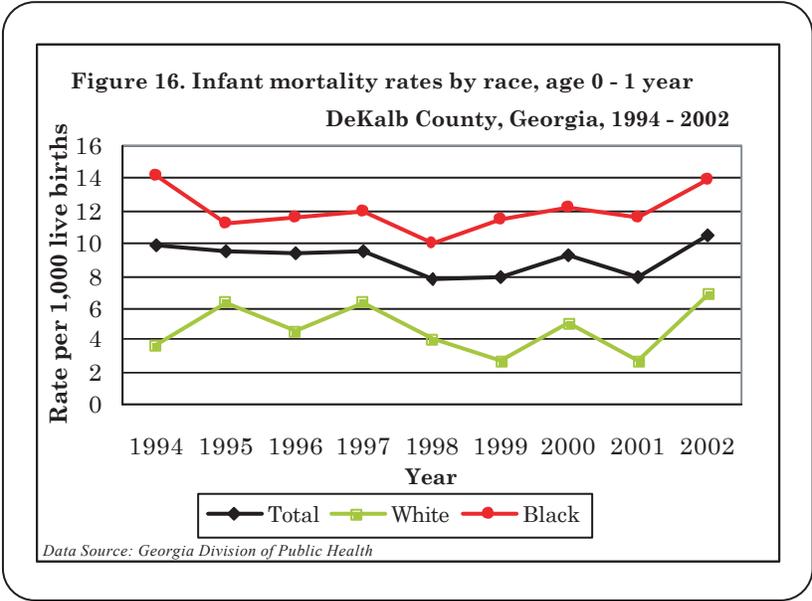


Table 10. Average nine-year infant mortality rates*

DeKalb County, Georgia, 1994 - 2002

Race/Ethnicity	Neonatal Rate	Post-Neonatal Rate	Total Rate	No. of Infant Deaths	No. of Infant Births
White	3.3	1.4	4.7	153	32,649
Black	8.4	3.5	12.0	682	56,961
Asian	1.7	1.9	3.6	15	4,196
Hispanic	2.3	1.1	3.4	37	10,832

* Per 1,000 live births

Data Source: Georgia Division of Public Health

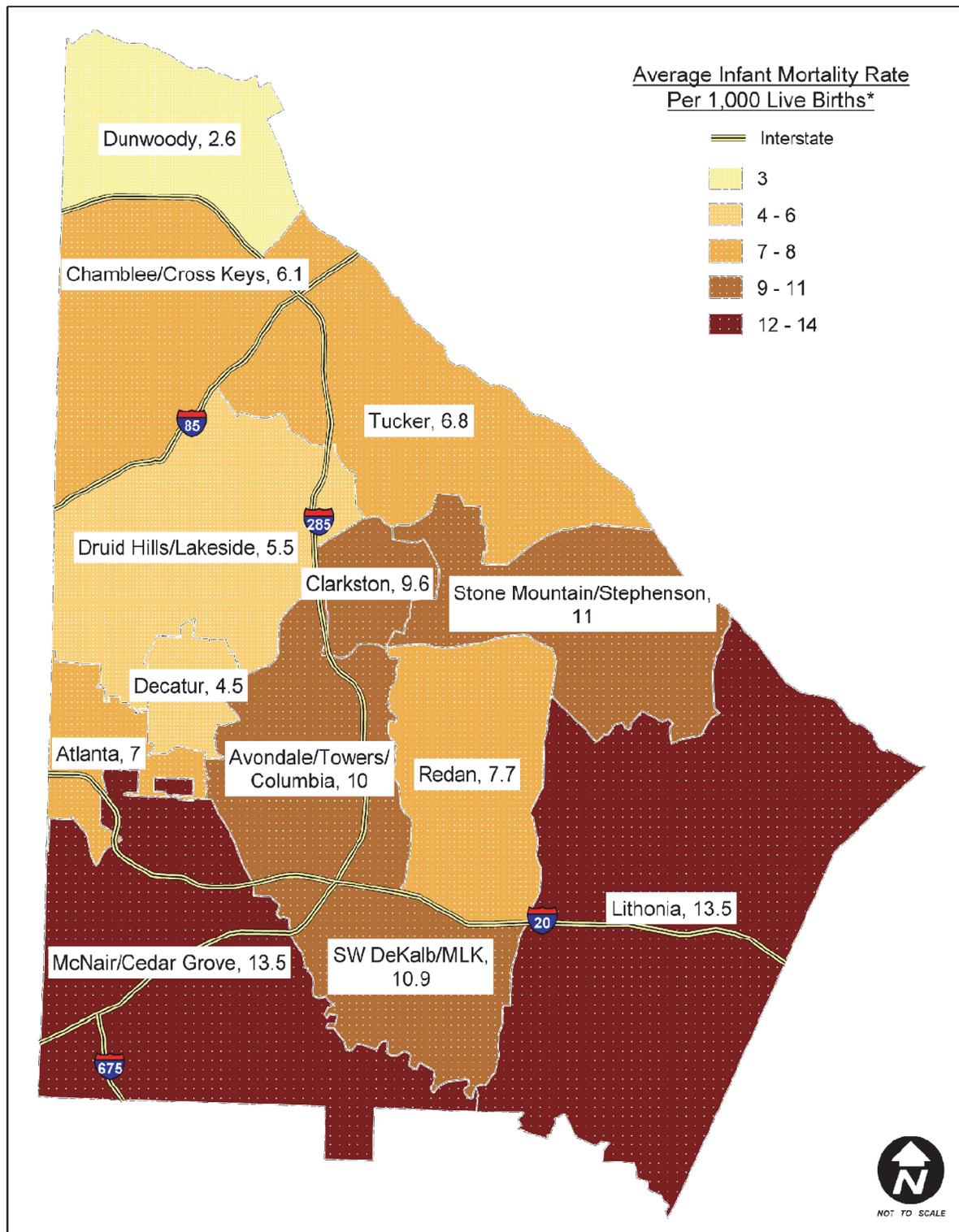
Of the 13 Community Health Assessment Areas, McNair/Cedar Grove and Lithonia have the highest infant mortality rate of 13.5 deaths per 1,000 live births (Figure 17). The communities with infant mortality rates higher than the county average are concentrated in the southeastern part of DeKalb: Avondale/Towers/Columbia, Clarkston, Lithonia, McNair/Cedar Grove, Stone Mountain/Stephenson and Southwest DeKalb/MLK Jr. Dunwoody had the lowest infant mortality rate of 2.6 infant deaths per 1,000 live births.

The overall DeKalb trend in infant mortality appears to be representative of a national trend (14). It has been suggested that the rise in infant mortality reflects a trend among women toward delaying motherhood.

Figure 17.

Infant Mortality, DeKalb County, GA (1998-2002)

Average infant mortality rate per 1,000 live births*
 Displayed by community health assessment area (CHAA)



*Average Infant Mortality Rate per 1,000 live births = Infant deaths divided by number of live births from 1998-2002, multiplied by 1,000

Produced by: Division of Health Assessment & Promotion, DeKalb County Board of Health (3/2004)
 Data Source: Office of Health Information & Policy, Georgia Division of Public Health (1/2004)

Adults Age 65 and Over

For the nine-year period from 1994 through 2002, the five leading causes of death to DeKalb County residents ages 65 and over were heart disease, cancer, stroke, neurologic disease and chronic lung disease (Figure 18). An average of 2,552 residents aged 65 and over died in each of these nine years. Of these, 1,487 (58%) were female and 1,812 (71%) were white. The five leading causes of death account for an average of 1,747 deaths per year, or 68% of all deaths in this age range, for the period of 1994 to 2002. The neurologic mortality rate, which includes Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases, increased the most, by 128% (Table 11).

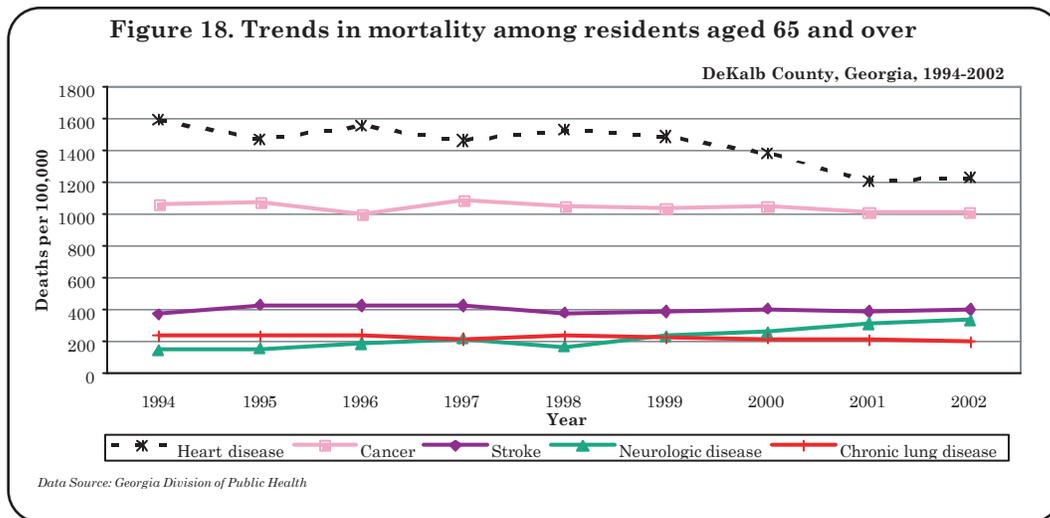


Table 11. Mortality rates of residents aged 65 and over
DeKalb County, Georgia, 1994-2002

Cause of Death	Nine-year avg rate*	% change from 1994 to 2002
Heart disease	1437.4	-23%
Cancer	1046.2	-5%
Stroke	403.3	7%
Neurologic disease	227.5	128%
Chronic lung disease	225.1	-16%

* Per 100,000 population

Data Source: Georgia Division of Public Health

The majority of heart disease deaths in this age group were due to ischemic heart disease (34%), heart attacks (23%) and heart failures (10%). For women, the major types of cancer-related deaths were lung cancer (23%), breast cancer (14%) and colon cancer (12%). For men, lung cancer (31%), prostate cancer (18%) and colon cancer (9%) were the leading cancer death types.