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Prison and Jail Deaths in Custody, 2000-2009 - Statistical Tables

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WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2011	**Contact: Kara McCarthy (202) 307-1241**
HTTP://WWW.BJS.GOV/	**After hours: (202) 202-598-9320**

NUMBER OF DEATHS IN LOCAL JAILS DECLINED IN 2008 AND 2009

Mortality rate in state prisons stable since 2003

WASHINGTON – The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) reported today that in 2009 both the rate and number of deaths in local jails dropped to one of the lowest levels in a decade, based on data from the Deaths in Custody Reporting Program (DCRP). The jail mortality rate dropped to 127 inmate deaths per 100,000 jail inmates in 2009 from 151 deaths per 100,000 in 2000. Over the past three years, the number of jail deaths has declined, from a high of 1,102 deaths in 2007 to 948 in 2009.

State prisons reported 3,408 inmate deaths in custody in 2009, an increase from 2,877 deaths in 2001. The mortality rate in state prisons has remained stable since 2003, fluctuating between 250 and 260 deaths per 100,000 prison inmates.

In 2008 and 2009, suicide, heart disease, cancer and liver disease remained the leading causes of death in state prisons and local jails. In 2009, 32 percent of deaths in jails were suicides and 21 percent were due to heart disease. Heart disease and cancer accounted for half (52 percent) and liver disease for 8 percent of all prisoner deaths in 2009.

Suicide rates in jails dropped each year between 2001 and 2007 (from 49 to 36 deaths per 100,000 inmates), before increasing in 2009 to 41 deaths per 100,000 inmates. In state prisons, the suicide rate has been fairly stable, fluctuating between 14 and 17 deaths per 100,000 prison inmates between 2001 and 2009.

AIDS-related deaths are down in both prisons and jails. Between 2000 and 2009, AIDS-related deaths in jails decreased by more than half (54 percent), from 57 to 26 deaths. Among state prison inmates, AIDS-related deaths declined 65 percent between 2001 and 2009, from 272 to 94 deaths. Blacks or African Americans accounted for 68 percent of AIDS-related deaths in state prisons and died from AIDS at a rate (21 deaths per 100,000 inmates) three times higher than whites (7 deaths per 100,000 inmates) and two times higher than Hispanics/Latinos (10 deaths per 100,000 inmates).

In 2009, homicides accounted for 2.4 percent of deaths in jails and 1.6 percent of deaths in state prisons. Deaths due to homicide in prisons and jails have been relatively stable over the last decade.

From 2000 to 2009, males and females in local jails died at about the same rate (141 and 132 deaths per 100,000 inmates, respectively), although males made up a significantly larger proportion of the jail population (88 percent). Males in local jails committed suicide at a rate 1.6 times higher than females, while females were 1.7 times more likely than males to die by drug or alcohol intoxication.

Males in prisons (260 deaths per 100,000 inmates) died at nearly twice the rate of females (153 deaths per 100,000 inmates) between 2001 and 2009. Male prisoners were twice as likely to die from liver disease (19 deaths per 100,000 inmates) than females (8 deaths per 100,000 inmates), and 1.5 times more likely than females to commit suicide.

Whites had the highest suicide rate in jails (80 deaths per 100,000 inmates). Hispanics/Latinos (25 deaths per 100,000 inmates) were three times less likely than whites to commit suicide in jails and 1.6 times more likely than blacks or African Americans (16 deaths per 100,000 inmates) to commit suicide in jails.

Prison inmates age 55 or older had the highest mortality rates between 2001 and 2009. From 2001 to 2009, they accounted for 41 percent of prison deaths but comprised 5 percent of the total prison population. Inmates age 55 or older also had the highest homicide rate (8 deaths per 100,000 inmates) in prisons, which was between 1.6 and 2.7 times greater than any other age group.

The report, *Prison and Jail Deaths in Custody, 2000-2009 - Statistical Tables* (*NCJ 236219*), was written by BJS statisticians Margaret Noonan and E. Ann Carson. Following publication, the report can be found on the BJS website at http://www.bjs.gov. The data were reported to BJS' Deaths in Custody Reporting Program (DCRP). The DCRP is a data collection that measures inmate mortality data in state prisons and local jails by the number and causes of deaths, excluding executions.

For additional information about the Bureau of Justice Statistics' statistical reports and programs, please visit the BJS website at http://www.bjs.gov/.

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