

# Asians, Hispanics live longest in California

## STUDY FINDS WHITES, BLACKS GET CANCER, HEART DISEASE MORE OFTEN

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Countering popular perception, a study released Wednesday shows that Asians and Hispanics in California live longer than whites and blacks.

The findings show that Asian men and women outlive whites by about five years, and Hispanic men outlive white men by two years. The disparity between Hispanic women and white women is even greater at three years.

These are among the most surprising discoveries in the Public Policy Institute of California study that analyzed death certificates, comparing the causes of death among the state's largest ethnic and racial groups.

The findings shocked health care experts, who said they dispel beliefs that diseases - such as cirrhosis and diabetes - lead to earlier deaths among Asians and Hispanics, who make up 12 percent and 35 percent of the state's population, respectively.

"I think information like this can help us get to the next step" in the discussion about how to solve ethnic health care disparities, said Ellen Wu, executive director of the California Pan-Ethnic Health Network in Oakland.

"Death in the Golden State" also found that college-educated people of all ethnicities live longer than those with less schooling, but educated Asians and Hispanics still outpace all of them.

Socioeconomic factors relating to mortality rates are nothing new, but "here, we have to ask if something else is responsible," says research fellow Helen Lee, who co-authored the report with Shannon McConville.

### Survey methodology

Lee and McConville spent a year combing through 694,317 death certificates issued in California from 2000 to 2002 to produce the report, which is considered the first comprehensive analysis of its kind for the state.

There is no known national study that makes similar comparisons, and the co-authors hope leaders across the country will consider their findings as they draft plans to reduce health problems common to specific minority groups.

"Clear racial and ethnic patterns emerge for many conditions," Lee said. "A more detailed understanding of the patterns could help health officials develop strategies that both target the leading causes of death and reduce disparities between groups."

Asians, the study shows, lived the longest of all ethnic groups, with men dying at about 80 and women dying at about 85 from a range of illnesses that include heart disease, cancers, strokes and aneurysms.

Hispanics followed closely, with men living just beyond 77 and women to 83, with the common causes of death related to heart disease, cancers and diabetes to a far lesser degree.

Both heart disease and all forms of cancers appear to affect whites and blacks at a far greater rate than Asians and Hispanics.

The report shows that almost 29 percent of the Asian males died of heart disease - two percentage points lower than blacks and three percentage points lower than whites.

### Diabetes in Hispanics

While Hispanics had the highest rate of deaths blamed on diabetes at 5 percent, they also had the lowest cancer death rate at about 20 percent.

Meanwhile, the report puts the life expectancy for a white man at about 75, while white women outlive them by about five years, with heart disease and cancers topping the list of causes.

White men, however, die from prostate cancer far more than others and are exceeded only by black men.

The report shows that 43 of 100,000 white men died of prostate cancer compared with 99 for black men, 37 for Hispanics and 19 for Asians.

Blacks also die significantly younger than all others, with men dying at about 68 and women at about 75. Heart disease and cancers were the leading causes. Of the study group, black men also had a greater chance of dying of homicide at nearly 4 percent, which is far greater than 2.8 percent for Hispanics, .6 percent for Asians and .3 percent for whites.

Wu questioned whether the report took into consideration the length of time the Asians and Hispanics have been in the country.

In fact, studies show newer immigrants are healthier when they come into the country, enjoying the benefits of eating their native foods and walking often.

Wu thinks that they develop bad habits when they come into America. This is commonly known as the "immigrant paradox." People become accustomed to a Western diet, high in fat and sugar. They also often exercise less in America.

Lupe Alonzo-Diaz, executive director of the Latino Coalition for Healthy California, also said studies show Latino children are born with fewer illnesses than other ethnicities.

It isn't until they get older that they learn bad habits that often lead to diabetes, obesity and other health problems.

If anything, she believes leaders could use the report to tailor their plans to the specific needs of each ethnic group.

"When it comes to prevention, there's no one size fits all plan," she said.

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