

Living Alone Linked to Mortality Risk From Multiple Causes in U.S. Including Cancer; Suicide Highest

ACS researchers stress targeted interventions to reduce adverse effects of social isolation

Key Takeaways:

- People living alone in the United States had a higher risk of death from many health conditions.
- Suicide, heart disease, diabetes, and colorectal cancer top the list of mortality causes associated with living alone for people under 65 years old.
- Sociodemographic characteristics, health conditions, lifestyle factors, and access to care contributed to a substantial proportion of deaths associated with living alone.

ATLANTA, October 27, 2026 — Living by yourself may carry serious health consequences. A new large study by researchers at the [American Cancer Society](#) (ACS) shows that living alone in the United States was associated with an increased risk of death from multiple causes, particularly in ages 18-64 years, with the highest risk for suicide in all ages. Colorectal cancer was also a driver of mortality associated with living alone, with a 27% higher risk compared with those living with others. The findings are to be published today in the *International Journal of Epidemiology*.

“Living alone is not necessarily harmful or a suboptimal living arrangement,” said [Dr. Hyunjung Lee](#), principal scientist, cancer disparity research at the American Cancer Society and lead author of the study. “However, our findings indicate that excess deaths among adults living alone compared to living with others are largely concentrated among individuals with existing health conditions and high-risk health exposures.”

According to the report, the number and proportion of adults living alone in the U.S. increased from 9.4 million (7.6%) in 1967 to 38.1 million (14.8%) in 2023. This increase has occurred across ages and both sexes, although the proportion of people living alone is higher among older adults.

For the study, researchers included 598,023 adults aged 18 and older from the 1998-2018 National Health Interview Survey-National Death Index. The authors used an estimated 22 years of follow-up to calculate hazard ratios for the association between living alone and mortality from multiple causes. Additionally, they quantified the contribution of selected characteristics to these mortality differences.

The results showed adults living alone had a higher risk of all-cause mortality compared with adults living with others, particularly in ages 18-64 years (by 22% vs. 6% in ages 65 and older). For the same age group, living alone increased an individual’s risk of dying from suicide (58%), heart disease (41%), diabetes (34%), colorectal cancer (27%), cerebrovascular disease (23%), accidents (17%), and all injuries (27%). Among adults aged 65 years, living alone was also associated with a higher risk of mortality from suicide (103%), hypertension (28%), heart disease (11%), and all injuries (16%).

Differences in sociodemographic, lifestyle, access-to-care, and health-related characteristics between living alone and living with others explained a substantial portion of mortality differences between the two groups; for example, 57.1% of the difference in all-cause mortality among ages 18-64 and 85.4% among those aged 65 years and older.

“Policy and clinical practice efforts are needed to identify modifiable risk factors that contribute to this higher risk of death among those living alone, including chronic disease management, injury prevention, improved access to preventive care and early detection, and screening for mental health conditions,” Lee added. “Understanding these factors can help identify people in this population who may benefit most from support and targeted interventions.”

Other ACS researchers contributing to this study include [Dr. Jordan Baeker Bispo](#), [Dr. Ahmedin Jemal](#), and senior author [Dr. Farhad Islami](#).

Additional ACS Resources:

- [Social Isolation and Loneliness](#)
- [U.S. Adults Living Alone at Higher Risk for Cancer Mortality](#)
- [Annual Cancer Statistics Report 2026](#)

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The American Cancer Society is a leading cancer-fighting organization with a vision to end cancer as we know it, for everyone. For more than 110 years, we have been improving the lives of people with cancer and their families as the only organization combating cancer through advocacy, research, and patient support. We are committed to ensuring everyone has an opportunity to prevent, detect, treat, and survive cancer. To learn more, visit cancer.org or call our 24/7 helpline at 1-800-227-2345. Connect with us on [Facebook](#), [X](#), and [Instagram](#).

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