



Wake County Public Health

Public Health Issue Brief: Unintentional Falls

OVERVIEW

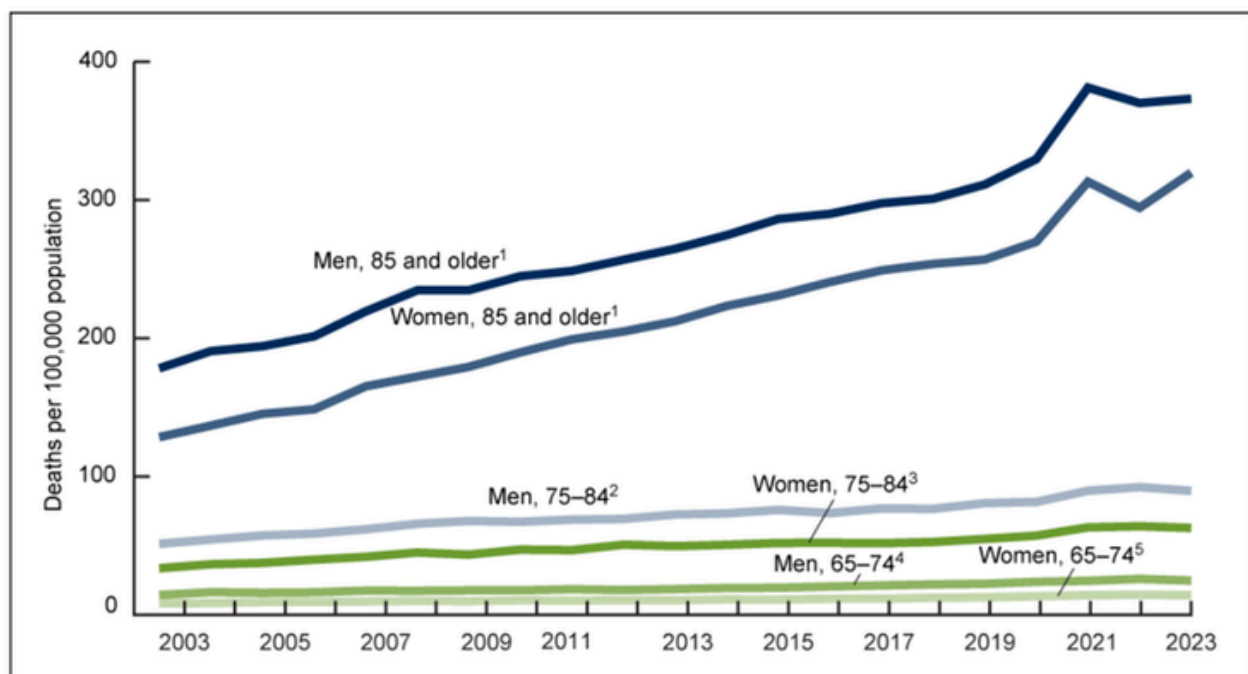
Unintentional falls are the leading cause of injury-related emergency department visits and hospitalizations in Wake County and a major cause of injury death, particularly among older adults. The risk of unintentional falls can be reduced through strategies at the individual, family, and community level.

What is an Unintentional Fall? An unintentional fall occurs when someone comes to rest on the ground, floor, or another lower level. Falls can result in minor injuries, serious injuries, or death.

While anyone can experience a fall, older adults are at a substantially higher risk for both falling and experiencing serious injury or death (as seen in Figure 1).

UNINTENTIONAL FALL DEATHS (NATIONAL)

Figure 1: Rate of Unintentional Fall Deaths for Adults Age 65 and Older, by Year, Sex, and Age Group, United States, 2003 - 2023

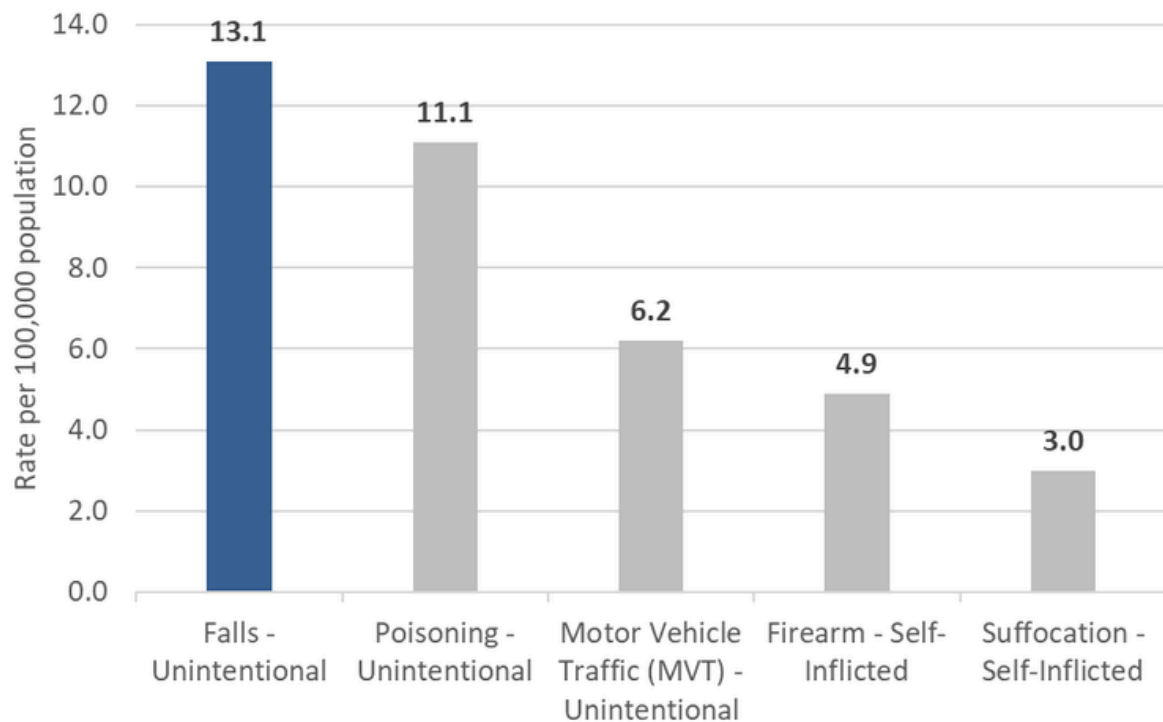


Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db532.htm>

BURDEN OF UNINTENTIONAL FALL DEATHS IN WAKE COUNTY (2020-2024*)

Although national trends (Figure 1) show higher unintentional fall death rates among males, Wake County data from 2020 to 2024 showed a slightly different sex distribution. Key local findings include:

Figure 2: Death Rates, Top Five Causes of Injury-Related Death, Wake County, 2024*

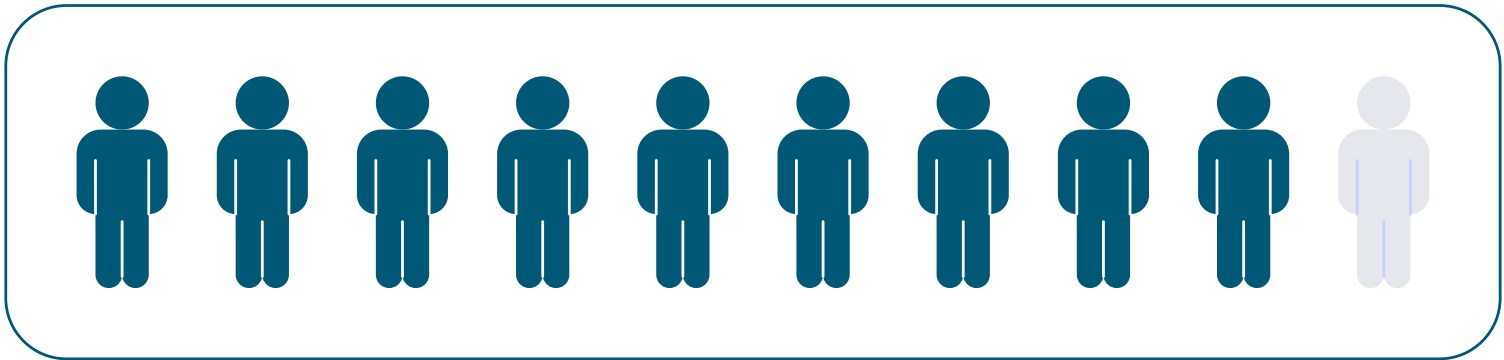


- Between 2020 and 2024, 790 Wake County residents died as a result of unintentional falls.
- Unintentional fall mortality rates were significantly higher among residents aged 65 years and older and among non-Hispanic White residents. Rates were also slightly higher among females compared to males.
- Falls were the leading cause of unintentional injury-related death among residents aged 65 years and older during 2020-2024.
- In 2024, unintentional falls accounted for 34% of all injury-related deaths in Wake County - more than any other injury cause.

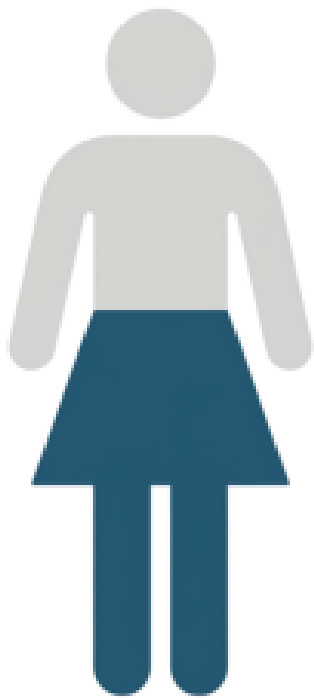
*2024 data provisional as of 08/01/2025.

Source: North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics, Vital Statistics Death Certificate Data, 2024*; US Census non-bridged single race population estimates 2024; provided by NCDHHS DPH Injury and Violence Prevention Branch.

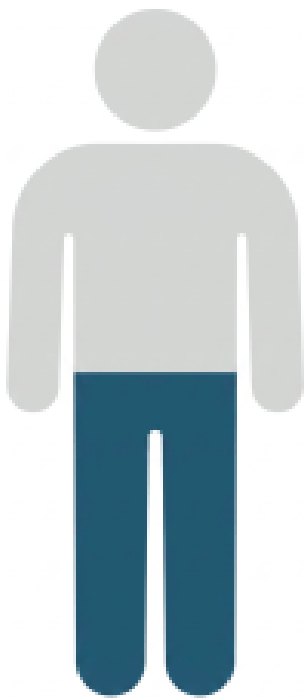
Approximately 9 out 10 unintentional fall deaths in Wake County between 2020 and 2024 occurred among adults ages **65 Years and Older**.



From 2020 to 2024, unintentional fall deaths in Wake County were distributed nearly equally between **females** (52%) and **males** (48%).



52%



48%

85%

of unintentional fall deaths in Wake County between 2020 and 2024 occurred among White Non-Hispanic residents.

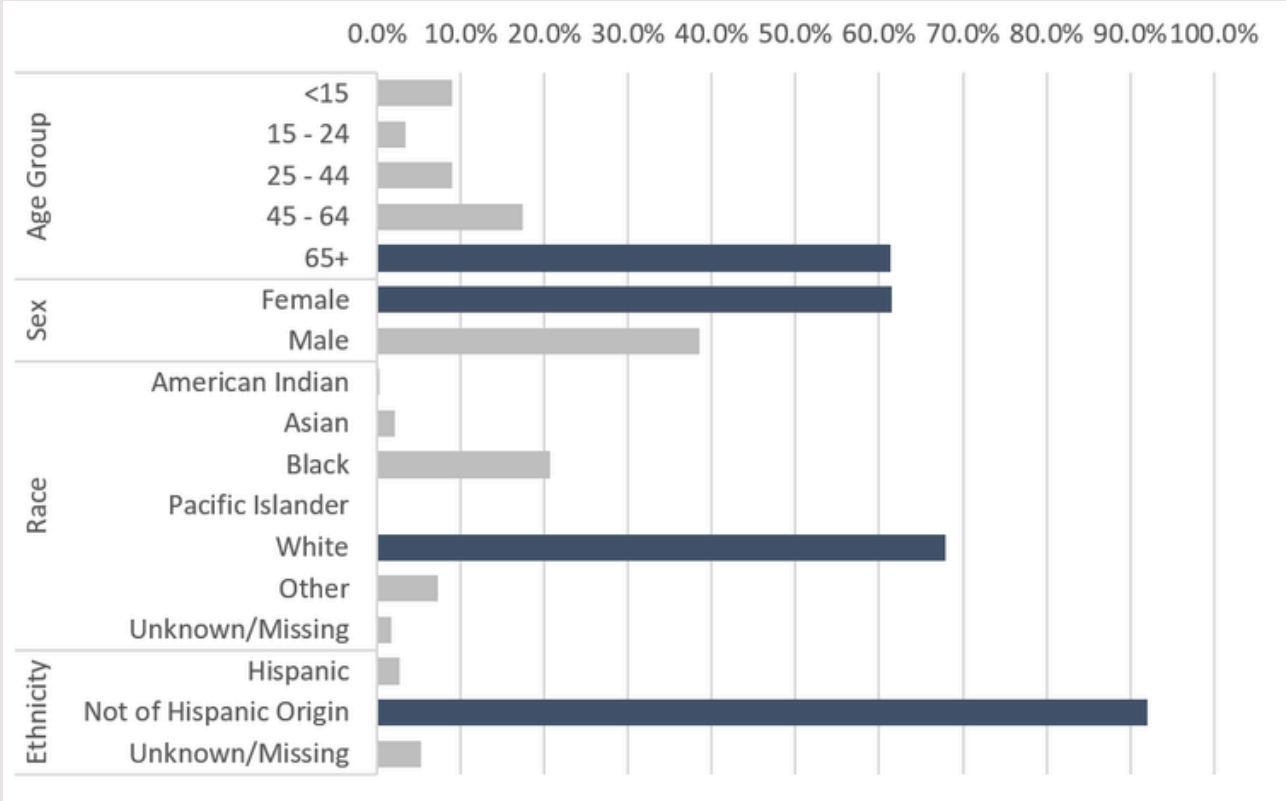
Notes for Pages 2 and 3:
*2024 death data provisional as of 08/01/2025.
NH = Non-Hispanic
AI/AN=American Indian/Alaska Native
Source: North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics, Vital Statistics Death Certificate Data, 2020-2024*; US Census non-bridged single race population estimates 2020-2024; provided by NCDHHS DPH Injury and Violence Prevention Branch.

BURDEN OF UNINTENTIONAL FALL EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT VISITS IN WAKE COUNTY (2020-2024*)

In 2025, there were approximately 1,500 emergency department visits for unintentional falls per 100,000 Wake County residents, highlighting the substantial burden of fall-related injuries in our community.

In Figure 3, the navy blue bars highlight the groups that accounted for the highest proportion of unintentional fall-related emergency department visits in 2025; adults aged 65 and older, females, White residents, and non-Hispanic residents.

Figure 3: Percentage of Emergency Department Visits for Unintentional Falls by Age Group, Sex, Race, and Ethnicity, 2025



AI/AN=American Indian/Alaska Native
*AI/AN and Pacific Islander were each less than 1%.
Source: North Carolina Disease Event Tracking and Epidemiologic Collection Tool (NC DETECT)

As Wake County's population continues to age, the burden of fall-related injuries is expected to increase without targeted prevention efforts. Planning for safe aging in place and fall risk screening in healthcare settings will be essential to reducing preventable injuries and deaths.

FACTORS THAT INCREASE FALL RISK

Environment or Home:

- Clutter
- Throw rugs
- Poor lighting
- Unstable furniture
- Wet or uneven floors
- Missing/ineffective safety equipment
- Hazardous working conditions

Personal Traits:

- Age
- Fall history
- Limited physical activity
- Chronic health conditions
- Difficulties with balance, mobility, vision, hearing, or cognition
- Vitamin D deficiency
- Certain medication/drugs and their side effects
- Alcohol consumption and other risk-taking behaviors

Reducing fall risk requires action from healthcare providers, families, communities, and older adults themselves.

How Older Adults Can Prevent Falls:

- 1) Find a balance or exercise program that works for you (ex. aquarobics, chair yoga, etc.).
- 2) Talk to your doctor about any concerns and review your medications with them.
- 3) Get your vision and hearing tested.
- 4) Keep your home safe by removing or fixing the items listed above.
- 5) Talk with your family about your concerns and fall risks.

Learn more about fall prevention and home safety through these trusted resources.

Fall Prevention Education and Resources:

- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

- <https://www.cdc.gov/falls/about/index.html>

- <https://www.cdc.gov/steady/index.html>

- <https://www.cdc.gov/still-going-strong/about/index.html>

- **National Council on Aging:**

- <https://www.ncoa.org/older-adults/health/prevention/falls-prevention/>

- **National Institute on Aging:**

- <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/falls-and-falls-prevention/falls-and-fractures-older-adults-causes-and-prevention>

- <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/falls-and-falls-prevention/preventing-falls-home-room-room>