**Car Crashes Leading Cause of Teen Deaths in U.S.**

**But CDC report finds murder, suicide and illnesses also kill many teens**

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WEDNESDAY, May 5 (HealthDay News) -- Of the more than 16,000 teenagers who die in the United States each year, most are killed in automobile accidents, but murder, suicide, cancer and heart disease also take their toll, a new government report finds.

In fact, among black male teens, homicide is the leading cause of death, said report author Arialdi M. Minino, a statistician at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics.

"This is a group of people we don't pay much attention to when we talk about mortality," Minino said. Teen deaths account for less than 1 percent of all deaths per year in the United States, he noted.

Still, Minino thinks that more needs to be done to cut the number of teenage deaths.

"These are preventable causes of death," he said. "So, this is a group where we can extend ourselves so kids won't die, by extending common sense ideas."

Each year in the United States, an estimated 16,375 children between the ages of 12 and 19 die. Nearly 50 percent die in accidents, with car crashes accounting for more than one-third of all deaths, Minino found.

But among black male teens, murder is the leading cause of death. Moreover, the highest teen death rate is among black males at 94.1 deaths per 100,000 people. "That's 15 times more than among white males. That's a very large disparity," Minino said.

The leading causes of death among teens stayed the same during the period studied, Minino noted. Accidents accounted for 48 percent of deaths; homicide, 13 percent; suicide, 11 percent; cancer, 6 percent; and heart disease, 3 percent.

In addition, from 1999 to 2006, the annual death rate for teens has remained constant, at about 49.5 deaths per 100,000 population, Minino said.

But the risk of dying is not the same for all teenagers. Boys are more likely to die than girls, and older teens are at higher risk of dying than younger teens.

For example, for 12-year-old boys the death rate is 46 percent higher than for girls. At 19, the death rate is three times higher for boys than girls (135.2 deaths and 46.1 deaths per 100,000, respectively), Minino found.

"I wish people would look at these groups with an eye toward intervention," Minino said. Teenagers are a "relatively neglected group when it comes to public health."

Another expert sees the human cost of teen deaths and stressed that even though the number of deaths is low, teenage deaths should not be ignored.

"I hope when people read this report they realize how sobering it is and are not falsely lulled by the fact that these adolescent deaths 'only' make up 1 percent of total deaths," said Dr. Karen Sheehan, medical director of the Injury Prevention and Research Center at Children's Memorial Hospital and medical director of the Injury Free Coalition for Kids in Chicago.

When thinking about deaths of young people, it is important to consider the years of potential life lost, she said.

"Every one of these 16,000 adolescents who died will never get married . . . or contribute positively to society," Sheehan said. "We should be appalled that this many deaths happen to children this age, and we should be ashamed that these deaths occur disproportionately in certain populations."