

SAMOANS IN THE UNITED STATES

DEMOGRAPHICS

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that in 2000 over 91,000 people in the United States indicated they were Samoan (one race alone)¹ and over 133,000 that were Samoan alone or in combination with other races².

HEALTH STATUS

It is difficult to characterize the health status of Samoans. Many studies do not differentiate between the various ethnicities studied. Small sample sizes make it difficult to generalize research findings. Finally, in some cases, data are just not available. For these reasons, the data contained here provide only a rough estimate of Samoan health status.

Life Expectancy

Life expectancy for Samoan men (71.0 years) and Samoan women (74.9 years) are lower than those for white men (73.2 years) and white women (79.6 years) respectively.³

MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH

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Starting prenatal care as early as possible during a pregnancy is believed to promote healthier birth outcomes for both the mother and infant. Nearly 52% of Samoan mothers do not begin prenatal care in the first trimester, higher than any other racial or ethnic group.³

CHRONIC DISEASES

Cancer

While very limited information exists on cancer among Samoans, data based on the examination of incidence records from cancer registries has provided a baseline.

Among American Samoans living in Hawaii, as well as those referred to Hawaii for diagnosis and treatment, the more commonly encountered cancers for men included cancer of the lung, prostate, stomach and liver, and leukemia. In American Samoan females, breast cancer was most frequent, followed by cancer of the corpus uteri, cervix uteri and thyroid, and leukemia.

Compared with other Polynesians (i.e., Western Samoans, and Hawaiians), American Samoan males have a relatively higher frequency of nasopharynx, lung, prostate, thyroid and liver cancers. Males were more likely to be diagnosed with cancer after metastasis had occurred (45% vs. 34%).⁴ Among American Samoans living in California, a relatively similar profile of cancer distribution was found.⁵

A large survey of Samoans from American Samoa, Hawaii, and Los Angeles documented cultural differences in the beliefs and understanding of cancer. For example, residents of American Samoa or Hawaii were more likely to say they did not want to know that they had cancer, that cancer is a punishment from God, and that cancer can be cured by traditional Samoan healers.⁶

Stroke

Some evidence suggests that stroke and traumatic brain injury are prevalent among American Samoans.⁷

HEALTH BEHAVIORS

Diet/Activity

A number of studies have examined the effects of modernization, migration and acculturation on the health of American Samoans. High rates of obesity among American Samoans has led to a number of comparative studies with Western Samoans and Samoans in Hawaii. Substantial dietary differences have been found between residents of

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American Samoa and those of the less modernized country of Western Samoa. American Samoans consumed significantly more energy as carbohydrate (47% vs 44%) and protein (18% vs 13%) and less as fat (36% vs 46%) and saturated fat (16% vs 30%). Intake of cholesterol and sodium were also higher among American Samoans. American Samoans of lower economic categories had lower intake of protein, cholesterol, and sodium, and higher intake of saturated fat.⁸ American Samoan children are also significantly heavier and taller than their Western Samoan counterparts, with the main influence being modernization.⁹

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