



## Medical Malpractice Is a Leading Cause of Preventable Death in District of Columbia

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Deaths from preventable medical error kill as many people in the nation's capital as guns, and far more than motor vehicle crashes, according to a new report from the D.C. Department of Health.

The [report](#), the first of its kind in the District of Columbia, analyzed the 5,168 total deaths reported to health officials in 2007. It determined that fully half of the deaths could have been prevented. Among the leading causes of preventable death:

1. Tobacco: 860 deaths

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2. Poor diet and physical inactivity: 780 deaths
3. Infections (not counting HIV): 240
4. Alcohol abuse: 150
5. Firearms: 140
6. Medical errors: 140
7. Poisons (and pollution): 110 deaths

Motor vehicle deaths were a distant 10th place on the list of leading preventable causes of death, with 30 deaths in D.C. in 2007, according to the Health Department.

Another interesting number: The Department estimates that as many people died from lack of health insurance -- which discourages access to medical care -- as motor vehicles -- 30 people in 2007.

The estimate of deaths from lack of health insurance is based on the number of uninsured people in D.C. and uses methodology from a report by the Kaiser Family Foundation. The estimate of deaths from medical error was made by applying D.C. population numbers to estimates that were made in 2000 by the Institute of Medicine, part of the National Academy of Sciences.

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