

Spinal Cord Injury Statistics

Every year thousands of Americans experience a spinal cord injury. These injuries can be devastating, causing physical and emotional distress, as well as loss of wages. The following statistics give an overall picture of spinal cord injury in the United States.

Annual number of people who experience a spinal cord injury: About 12,000 new cases of spinal cord injury occur each year. This does not count people who die from a spinal cord injury before reaching the hospital.

Number of Americans living with a spinal cord injury: There are approximately 259,000 people in the U.S. living with a spinal cord injury, but because it is estimation, this number could be higher or lower. As few as 229,000 people or as many as 306,000 Americans may be living with an SCI.

Average age at time of injury: 40.2 years. The average age of injury has increased steadily since the 1970s, in part because the median age in the U.S. has risen over this period.

Injury percentage by gender: 80.9 % males. Most spinal cord injuries occur in males; experts believe this is partially due to males being more likely to engage in risk taking behavior.

Injury percentage by race/ethnicity since 2005:

66.1 % Caucasian
27.1 % African American
8.1% Hispanic
2.0% Asian

Causes by percentage since 2005:

42.1 % motor vehicle accidents
26.7% falls
15.1% violence
7.6% sports incidents

8.6% other or unknown

Most spinal cord injuries from violence are due to gunshot wounds. The percentage of spinal cord injuries from violence has declined since a peak of 24.8% during the decade ending in 1999. Injuries due to sports have declined over time, while spinal cord injuries due to falls have increased.

Neurologic level of injury: An injury to one of the spinal cords eight cervical segments causes quadriplegia (tetraplegia)—loss of all or most function in all four limbs. Injury to the spinal cord's thoracic, lumbar, or sacral regions causes paraplegia—loss of function of the legs. Complete paralysis means that the person has no voluntary use of the affected limbs; incomplete paralysis means that the person has some voluntary use of the affected limbs.

Neurologic level at hospital discharge:

30.1% incomplete quadriplegia (tetraplegia)
25.6% complete paraplegia
20.4% complete quadriplegia (tetraplegia)
18.4 % incomplete paraplegia.

Length of stay:

Average of 12 days in the hospital
Average of 37 days in rehabilitation center

Occupational Status:

57.5 % employed at time of injury
11.5 % employed one year after injury
35.4% employed twenty years after injury

Residence after injury:

87.8% in private residences, generally the home prior to injury
6.8% hospitals, group living homes, or other places
5.7 % nursing homes

Marital Status at time of injury:

More than 50% of SCI patients are single at the time of the injury.

The divorce rate is slightly increased over rate for the general population for people who are married at the time of the SCI; it also increases slightly for those who marry after the injury. The likelihood of marriage is slightly decreased from the rate for the general population in people who were not married at the time of the injury.

Cause of death:

The leading causes of death for people with SCIs are pneumonia, pulmonary embolism, and septicemia (infections from any part of the body which have entered the blood stream; also called blood poisoning). Until recently renal failure (kidney failure) was the leading cause of death in people with a spinal cord injury; today, advances in urologic management are saving lives.

Source: <http://www.brainandspinalcord.org/spinal-cord-injury/statistics.htm>