



Laura Belin &lt;desmoinesdem@bleedingheartland.com&gt;

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## Q on counting Iowa's COVID-19 deaths

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**Laura Belin** <desmoinesdem@bleedingheartland.com>

Thu, Jul 16, 2020 at 11:13 AM

To: "Mccoy, Amy" &lt;amy.mccoy@idph.iowa.gov&gt;, "Carfrae, Alex" &lt;alex.carfrae@idph.iowa.gov&gt;, "Garrett, Pat" &lt;pat.garrett@iowa.gov&gt;

Trying again on these questions and copying Pat Garrett, since apparently you are supposed to route your media inquiries through the governor's office now.

I'm seeking to confirm whether the total COVID-19 deaths IDPH reports to the public (now 777 on the state website) includes all of what the CDC describes as "multiple cause" deaths, or only what the CDC describes as "underlying cause" deaths.

I'm also wondering why the state website is showing zero COVID-19 deaths for Winneshiek County today, when that county's public health department reported a fatality on Monday.

<https://twitter.com/SenatorRobHogg/status/1283786673642450950>

Thanks,

Laura

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Laura Belin** <desmoinesdem@bleedingheartland.com>

Date: Thu, Jul 9, 2020 at 2:03 PM

Subject: Fwd: Q on counting Iowa's COVID-19 deaths

To: Carver-Kimm, Polly <Polly.Carver-Kimm@idph.iowa.gov>, Carfrae, Alex <alex.carfrae@idph.iowa.gov>

Is IDPH seriously not going to clarify this for me? If so, I am seeking comment on why the department wouldn't want to be clear about how deaths from COVID-19 are categorized. The dashboard says "COVID-19 cases resulting in death." I'm just trying to find out specifically how these fatalities are classified. The CDC press office promptly explained what their two categories for COVID-19 deaths mean.

Laura

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From: **Laura Belin** <desmoinesdem@bleedingheartland.com>

Date: Wed, Jul 8, 2020 at 8:44 AM

Subject: Fwd: Q on counting Iowa's COVID-19 deaths

To: Carfrae, Alex <alex.carfrae@idph.iowa.gov>, Carver-Kimm, Polly <Polly.Carver-Kimm@idph.iowa.gov>

Can someone at IDPH please answer this simple question? I want to clarify things for my readers and I would prefer not to write, "The Iowa Department of Public Health did not answer Bleeding Heartland's repeated questions about how COVID-19 deaths are counted." That would likely fuel conspiracy theories, which is the opposite of the point of this post.

I don't understand why it is so difficult for someone on your end to clarify whether the 732 COVID-19 deaths now reported on the state website represent all coronavirus-related fatalities or only what CDC would call "underlying cause" deaths.

Laura

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From: **Laura Belin** <[desmoinesdem@bleedingheartland.com](mailto:desmoinesdem@bleedingheartland.com)>  
Date: Tue, Jul 7, 2020 at 4:22 PM  
Subject: Re: Q on counting Iowa's COVID-19 deaths  
To: Carfrae, Alex <[alex.carfrae@idph.iowa.gov](mailto:alex.carfrae@idph.iowa.gov)>

Alex, circling back on this question about how IDPH counts deaths from COVID-19. What can you tell me?

On Mon, Jul 6, 2020 at 3:20 PM Laura Belin <[desmoinesdem@bleedingheartland.com](mailto:desmoinesdem@bleedingheartland.com)> wrote:

Yes. I got it from here:

<https://data.cdc.gov/NCHS/Weekly-Counts-of-Deaths-by-State-and-Select-Causes/muzy-jte6/data>

I couldn't capture the whole table but these are the weekly figures, starting with the week of April 4, 2020. Numbers on the left are COVID-19, "Multiple cause of death," while numbers on the right are COVID-19, "underlying cause of death." I have since confirmed with the CDC press office that the numbers on the right are a subset of numbers on the left. Confusion over the CDC's presentation of data has led some to assert (wrongly) on social media that the total COVID-19 deaths in Iowa are nearly double what has been reported.

Thanks,

Laura

On Mon, Jul 6, 2020 at 2:37 PM Carfrae, Alex <[alex.carfrae@idph.iowa.gov](mailto:alex.carfrae@idph.iowa.gov)> wrote:

Laura, can you send me the attachment you sent to Amy with the graphs you referenced. Thank you

Alex Carfrae  
Iowa Department of Public Health  
Bureau of Emergency and Trauma Services  
Division of Acute Disease Prevention, Emergency Response, and Environmental Health  
321 E. 12th St.  
Des Moines, IA 50319-0075  
Mobile: 515-745-4407; Fax 515-281-0488

[alex.carfrae@idph.iowa.gov](mailto:alex.carfrae@idph.iowa.gov)  
sent from my Google Pixel 2

On Mon, Jul 6, 2020, 12:19 PM Laura Belin <[desmoinesdem@bleedingheartland.com](mailto:desmoinesdem@bleedingheartland.com)> wrote:

Thanks, Alex. The main thing I want to confirm is whether all of the "multiple cause" COVID-19 deaths (as recorded by CDC) are part of Iowa's announced death toll (at this writing 722).

On Mon, Jul 6, 2020 at 11:36 AM Carfrae, Alex <[alex.carfrae@idph.iowa.gov](mailto:alex.carfrae@idph.iowa.gov)> wrote:

Thanks Polly.

Laura, I'll need to do some checking and get back to you on your question.

On Mon, Jul 6, 2020 at 11:31 AM Carver-Kimm, Polly <[polly.carver-kimm@idph.iowa.gov](mailto:polly.carver-kimm@idph.iowa.gov)> wrote:

Hi Laura, Alex Carfrae is filling in for Amy during her vacation. I'm copying him on this response.

Best,  
Polly

**Polly Carver-Kimm**

Communications Director | Iowa Department of Public Health | 321 E. 12th St | Des Moines, IA 50319 | 515-281-6693 (24/7) | [Polly.Carver-Kimm@idph.iowa.gov](mailto:Polly.Carver-Kimm@idph.iowa.gov)

***Protecting and Improving the Health of Iowans***

On Mon, Jul 6, 2020 at 11:28 AM Laura Belin <[desmoinesdem@bleedingheartland.com](mailto:desmoinesdem@bleedingheartland.com)> wrote:

Polly, I got the out of office auto-reply from Amy today. I'm hoping to get clarification from IDPH on this for a post in progress. There are some conspiracy theories floating around about supposedly undercounted deaths. I want to set the record straight but I need to be clear about exactly how IDPH is counting.

Thanks,

Laura

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From: **Laura Belin** <[desmoinesdem@bleedingheartland.com](mailto:desmoinesdem@bleedingheartland.com)>

Date: Thu, Jul 2, 2020 at 2:34 PM

Subject: Fwd: Q on counting Iowa's COVID-19 deaths

To: Mccoy, Amy <[amy.mccoy@idph.iowa.gov](mailto:amy.mccoy@idph.iowa.gov)>

Hello Amy,

I have confirmed with the CDC that "underlying cause" COVID-19 deaths are a subset of "multiple cause" deaths, so the two totals should not be added together.

Please confirm whether IDPH is reporting "multiple cause" deaths or only the "underlying cause" ones. The dashboard mentions "cases resulting in death," which is not entirely clear.

As you may be aware, people have been speculating on social media that IDPH is undercounting deaths. I have a post in progress to explain how the CDC is counting deaths and would like to provide the most accurate information about how IDPH is counting. If you have no comment I can say that IDPH refused to clarify its counting method. But it would be helpful for Iowans to be able to understand IDPH's methodology on this.

Laura

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Laura Belin** <[desmoinesdem@bleedingheartland.com](mailto:desmoinesdem@bleedingheartland.com)>

Date: Wed, Jul 1, 2020 at 10:44 AM

Subject: Q on counting Iowa's COVID-19 deaths

To: Mccoy, Amy <[amy.mccoy@idph.iowa.gov](mailto:amy.mccoy@idph.iowa.gov)>

Amy,

There has been some confusion about how IDPH is counting COVID-19 deaths.

The CDC publishes weekly data showing COVID-19 as "underlying cause" of death and COVID-19 as one of "multiple causes" of death.

I'm attaching an image showing part of a table with Iowa numbers for 2020. The multiple cause COVID-19 deaths for particular weeks are in the left column, and the underlying cause deaths are on the right.

My questions:

1. Is it accurate to say that IDPH is ONLY counting "underlying cause" deaths when reporting the total number of COVID-19 fatalities in Iowa? (717 at this writing)
2. Are the "underlying cause" deaths reported by the CDC a subset of "multiple cause" deaths? Or are those two different groups of people?

It looks to me like it may be a subset. For instance, if the CDC shows 17 multiple cause deaths and 16 underlying cause deaths from COVID-19 for a given week in Iowa, I interpret that to mean that 17 Iowans died that week of COVID-19, of whom one had another condition that contributed to the death.

Some are claiming that these are different groups, so using that example, they would assume 33 Iowans died with COVID-19 in that week, of whom 17 had multiple conditions and 16 had only COVID-19 when they died.

It's important to clarify this because I have seen people cite the CDC numbers to assert that IDPH is underreporting by around 50 percent the total number of COVID-19 deaths in Iowa.

Thank you in advance for whatever light you can shed on these confusing numbers.

Yours,

Laura

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**Alex Carfrae**

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[Latest IDPH COVID-19 Information](#)

[Stay Home! Wash your hands, Cover your Coughs and Sneezes](#)

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