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New Study Finds Higher Prevalence of Age-Related Macular Degeneration (AMD) Cases than Previously Determined and a High Degree of County Variation

New study from leading researchers at NORC at the University of Chicago, the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, University of Michigan, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, shows higher prevalence rates of AMD, a leading cause of vision loss in the United States-

CHICAGO (Nov. 3, 2022) – A new study “[The Prevalence of Age-Related Macular Degeneration in the United States In 2019](#)” published in *JAMA Ophthalmology*, found that in 2019, there were an estimated 19.83 million Americans were living with some form of age-related macular degeneration (AMD) in 2019. This is an increase of approximately more than 2.75 times [previous estimates](#) (which used a more conservative definition of early AMD based on larger drusen size). An estimated 18.34 million Americans had early AMD and 1.49 million had the late-stage vision threatening form of AMD (“late AMD” included choroidal neovascularization and geographic atrophy). In addition to national prevalence data, the new study also provides data by state and by county.

[AMD is a leading cause of vision loss](#) for Americans ages 50 and older. AMD prevalence has not been estimated for the United States in over a decade and early AMD prevalence estimates are scarce and have been inconsistently measured. The new study was authored by researchers from [NORC at the University of Chicago \(NORC\)](#), the [Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation \(IHME\)](#) at the University of Washington (Seattle), The [Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences, University of Michigan](#), the [Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan](#), and the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s \(CDC\) Vision Health Initiative](#), with support from [Prevent Blindness](#).

“AMD is a major cause of vision impairment and blindness, and costs Medicare approximately \$1,290 per beneficiary diagnosed,” said David B. Rein, Ph.D., Program Area Director for NORC at the University of Chicago’s Public Health Analytics Program and the lead author of the study. “We developed estimates at the national, state, and county level with an interest in helping local officials understand their area’s disease burden of AMD.”

Additional key findings from the study include:

- Approximately one in 10 Americans ages 50 and older have the early form of AMD and approximately 1 out of every 100 Americans ages 50 and older have the vision threatening late form.
- Among persons ages 80 and older, approximately 3 in 10 had early AMD, and approximately 1 in 10 have the vision threatening late form.
- Gender, and age-standardized rates of the disease were lowest for Black Americans as compared to other race/ethnicity groups.
- The prevalence of both early and late AMD varied widely by U.S. County. After standardizing by gender and race/ethnicity, rates for vision threatening AMD were the highest in the Midwest and New England regions of the country, and in Florida.

“Age-related macular degeneration is a leading cause of vision loss in older adults. With the aging of the U.S. population, there may be an increased burden of this condition on the functioning and independence of older adults,” said CDC epidemiologist Elizabeth Lundeen, PhD, MPH. “Providing updated data on the distribution of AMD across U.S. states and counties, this first analysis of its kind, can aid in the prioritization and planning of public health interventions to mitigate the disability-related consequences of this common eye disease.”

Study estimates were developed using data within CDC’s [Vision and Eye Health Surveillance System \(VEHSS\)](#). The VEHSS houses diverse data sources for vision - including Medicare, Medicaid, and private insurance claims data, electronic health record data, and self-reported and clinical evaluation data from representative national surveys. Researchers used a statistical methodology called Bayesian meta-regression which used the system’s multiple data sources to produce new, more comprehensive national and state-level estimates of vision loss and blindness.

“This granular level of detail on AMD cases across the country helps medical communities and decision makers gain a better understanding of where the greatest need is for treatment, public health outreach, and resources,” said Abraham D. Flaxman, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Health Metrics Sciences (IMHE) at the University of Washington’s School of Medicine, and study co-author. “Our hope is that this new data will ultimately improve population health at the local, state, and national level.”

Prevent Blindness serves as an engagement and communication channel for the VEHSS, working directly with NORC, CDC, and other partners. For AMD patients and their caregivers, Prevent Blindness offers the redesigned [Living Well with Low Vision](#) resource, with a variety of free directories, library of self-help guides, downloadable apps, and news interest for people living with AMD and significant visual impairment.

For more information on the “The Prevalence of Age-Related Macular Degeneration in the United States In 2019” study or the VEHSS, visit

<https://www.cdc.gov/visionhealth/vehss/>. Or visit the Prevent Blindness page at <https://preventblindness.org/amd-prevalence-vehss>.

For information on AMD, please visit

<https://www.cdc.gov/visionhealth/resources/features/macular-degeneration.html> or <https://preventblindness.org/amd-age-related-macular-degeneration/>.

About NORC at the University of Chicago

NORC at the University of Chicago conducts research and analysis that decision-makers trust. As a nonpartisan research organization and a pioneer in measuring and understanding the world, we have studied almost every aspect of the human experience and every major news event for more than eight decades. Today, we partner with government, corporate, and nonprofit clients around the world to provide the objectivity and expertise necessary to inform the critical decisions facing society.

www.norc.org

About the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation

The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) is an independent global health research organization at the University of Washington School of Medicine that provides rigorous and comparable measurement of the world's most important health problems and evaluates the strategies used to address them. IHME is committed to transparency and makes this information widely available so that policymakers have the evidence they need to make informed decisions on allocating resources to improve population health.

About University of Michigan

The University of Michigan is recognized as a leading university globally across disciplines. It ranks second among U.S. public institutions and in the top 10 overall as a recipient of NIH research funds. The Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences is one of the top ranked departments in the country for both NIH funding and clinical care. With over \$80 million annually in funded awards, the Institute for Social Research (ISR), is the world's largest academic social science survey and research organization, a leader in developing and applying new social science methods, and committed to educating the next generation of social scientists.

About the Vision Health Initiative

CDC's Vision Health Initiative (VHI) works to improve vision health in the U.S. through collaborations with state and national partners to strengthen science and develop interventions that promote eye health and prevent vision loss and blindness in groups at high risk. VHI also seeks to address risk factors like glaucoma, reduce disparities in vision loss and eye disease, and improve health and quality of life for people with vision loss. VHI designs and implements public health surveillance at the state and national level, supports applied public health research, and promotes the dissemination of

evidence-based vision health interventions. In collaboration with state and community partners, VHI works to integrate vision health activities into broader public health strategies and interventions. For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/visionhealth.

About Prevent Blindness

Founded in 1908, Prevent Blindness is the nation's leading volunteer eye health and safety organization dedicated to fighting blindness and saving sight. Focused on promoting a continuum of vision care, Prevent Blindness touches the lives of millions of people each year through public and professional education, advocacy, certified vision screening and training, community and patient service programs and research. These services are made possible through the generous support of the American public. Together with a network of affiliates, Prevent Blindness is committed to eliminating preventable blindness in America. For more information, visit us at preventblindness.org, and follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [YouTube](#).

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