

Multiple Sclerosis (MS)

What is Multiple Sclerosis?

Multiple sclerosis is a chronic, unpredictable disease of the central nervous system (the brain, optic nerves, and spinal cord). It is thought to be an autoimmune disorder. This means the immune system incorrectly attacks the person's healthy tissue. MS can cause blurred vision, loss of balance, poor coordination, slurred speech, tremors, numbness, extreme fatigue, problems with memory and concentration, paralysis, and blindness. These problems may be permanent, or they may come and go.¹

Most people with MS are diagnosed between the ages of 20 and 50, although rare individuals as young as 2 and as old as 75 have developed it. MS is not considered a fatal disease and the majority of people with MS do not become severely disabled. MS is not contagious and is not directly inherited. However, studies indicate that genetic factors may make certain individuals more susceptible to the disease.¹

The National Multiple Sclerosis Society estimates prevalence of MS by the number of members of the society who report having MS. The Inland Northwest Chapter of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society reported 2,450 self-declared MS members in Spokane County as of May 2008.

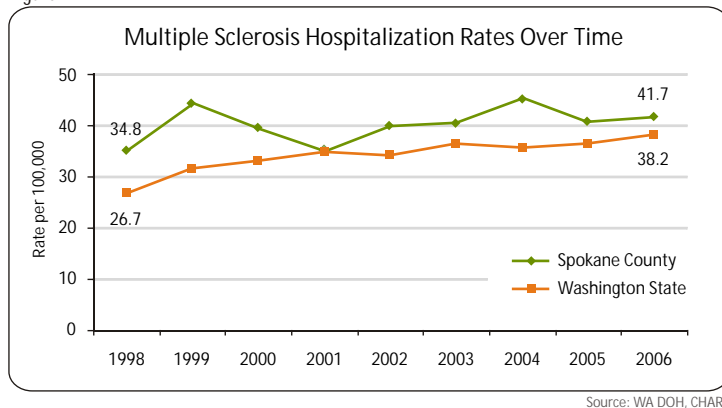
The prevalence of MS can only be estimated based on the following factors. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) does not require U.S. physicians to report new cases because MS is not an infectious disease. Also, there is no definitive medical test for MS and symptoms can be completely invisible. A diagnosis of MS is made when an individual meets several criteria, which are identified through a medical history, a neurologic exam, and various tests.¹

Hospitalization Rates

Monitoring chronic conditions can be challenging, but one method is to evaluate hospitalizations for that condition. Although inpatient hospitalizations only capture the more severe cases, it allows for comparisons over time, by demographics, and to different geographies. Hospitalization rates were evaluated using ICD-9 code 340 in the primary and next 4 secondary diagnosis.

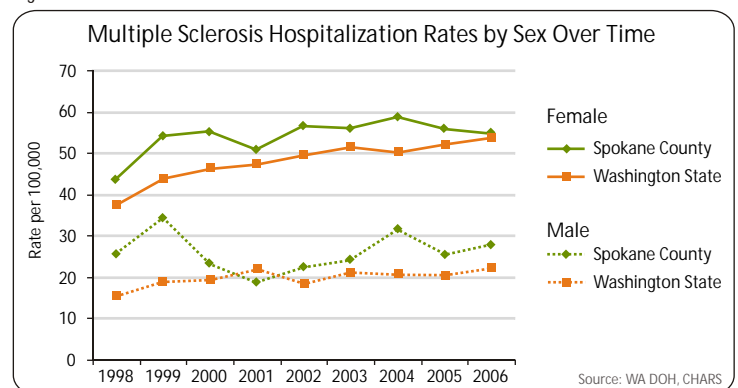
In Spokane County, hospitalization rates for multiple sclerosis showed no significant change over time. In contrast, rates for Washington State significantly increased over time (Fig. 1).

Figure 1



Females in Spokane County are two times more likely than males to be hospitalized with multiple sclerosis. Spokane County MS hospitalization rates were similar to Washington State rates for both males and females (Fig. 2).

Figure 2



In Spokane County, MS hospitalizations increased with age, peaking at 55-59 years of age for females and 60-64 years for males (Fig. 3).

Figure 3

