

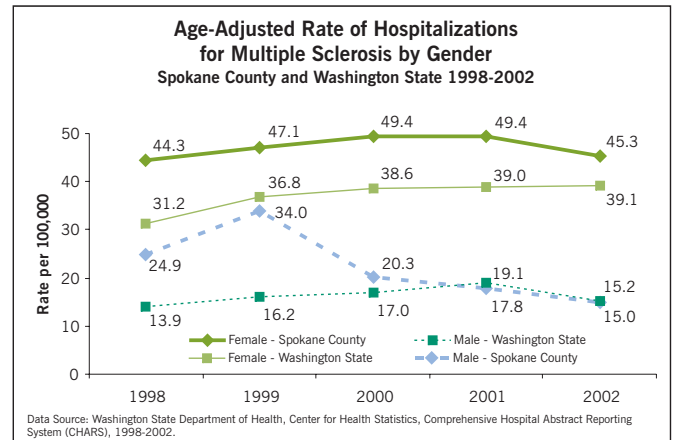
What is Multiple Sclerosis?

Multiple Sclerosis (MS) 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.

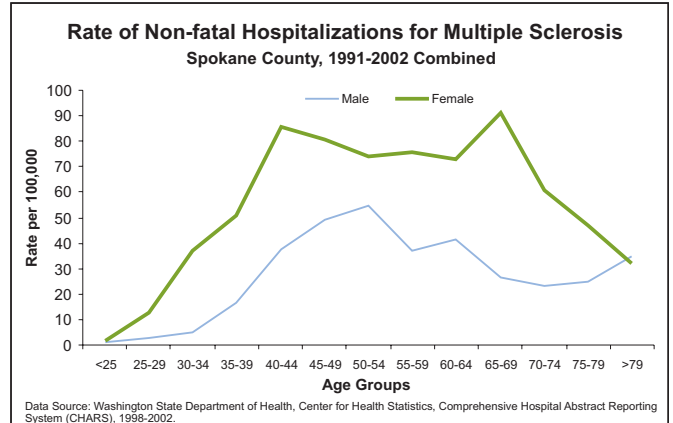
Most people with MS are diagnosed between the ages of 20 and 50, although rare individuals as young as 2 and as old as 75 have developed it. MS is not considered a fatal disease and the majority of people with MS do not become severely disabled. MS is not contagious and is not directly inherited. However,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

Hospitalization Rates

In Spokane County, overall hospitalization rates have decreased over the last four years compared to Washington State rates which have remained fairly stable.

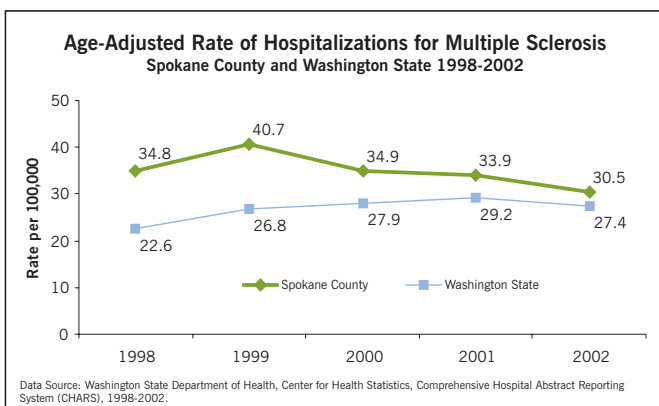


In Spokane County, hospitalizations due to MS was most prevalent for females after 40 years of age and up to age 70. Male hospitalizations are concentrated around 50 years of age and then drop off.



Approximately 400,000 Americans acknowledge having MS and every week about 200 people are diagnosed. Worldwide, MS may affect 2.5 million individuals. Because the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) does not require U.S. physicians to report new cases, and because symptoms can be completely invisible, the numbers can only be estimated.¹

The Inland Northwest Chapter of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society reported 966 self-declared MS members as of May 2002 in Spokane County.



Multiple Sclerosis affects females in Spokane County at rates two to three times higher than males. The Spokane County rate for females with MS is much higher than the Washington State rate.