

Farmers

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A less encouraging statistic from this year's report: The rate of new cancers, as opposed to recurrences, among young adults in the state — those from 20 to 39 years old — ranks second highest nationally, behind only West Virginia's.

The rate of new cancers in young adults for 2018 to 2022 was 7.5% higher than the rate from 2008 to 2012. That is considered significant.

Researchers were unable to say why the new cancer rates increased for young adults. Michele West, a University of Iowa associate research scientist, said in an email it will require additional research to find an answer.

Fortunately, Iowa has a high proportion of cases diagnosed at an early stage, when cancers are more treatable, West said, and the Iowa group's mortality rate is comparable to that for the U.S. as a whole.

Overall, Iowa continues to have the second-highest rate of new cancers nationally after Kentucky and is one of only three states, along with West Virginia and Utah, with rising new cancer rates.

Iowans are expected to be diagnosed with 21,700 new, invasive cancers this year, with 6,400 residents expected to die, according to the report's estimate. The number of cancer survivors in Iowa is expected to grow to 175,290, the report says.

Iowa farmers, spouses had some cancers more than state

The Iowa Cancer Registry, which tapped the national Agricultural Health Study, reported that the spouses of Iowa farmers had 10% fewer overall cancers than the state's population as a whole.

About 89,000 farmers and their spouses in Iowa and North Carolina participate in the ongoing Agricultural Health Study. The analysis looking at farm and state-wide cancer rates used data from 1994 to 2015.

The researchers determined how many cancer cases would be expected among participating Iowa farmers and spouses if they developed cancer at the same rates as other state residents. It then compared the expected number to the number of cancers found in its study group, adjusting for age and gender.

The Cancer in Iowa report said farmers in the state had fewer cases of colon and rectal, lung, bladder and other cancers, but more cases than expected of prostate and lip cancers.

Iowa farmers' spouses had fewer cases of colon and rectal, lung, bladder, pancreatic and cervical cancers than other Iowans but had more melanoma and thyroid cancer, the report said.

The report said Iowa farmers and spouses were less likely to smoke and drink than the general state population, although a higher proportion of farmers used smokeless tobacco.

A higher percentage of Iowa farmers and spouses were considered overweight or obese, based on data from 1995 when compared to the general population. Since then, the report noted, Iowa's overall obesity rate has nearly doubled to 40%.

Over the Agricultural Health Study's 32 years, 11,347 cancers have been diagnosed in the participating farmers, including 6,478 in Iowa, and 5,254 in the spouses, including 3,436 in Iowa, the Cancer in Iowa report said.

What does the report say about nitrates, other environmental factors?

While high nitrate levels in drinking water are linked to some cancers, Charlton said more research is needed to quantify the impact of agriculture-related risk factors such as nitrates and pesticides.

A separate group Charlton belongs to recently released a report looking at key drivers of cancer in Iowa. The researchers told Iowa lawmakers Wednesday that legislation raising taxes on tobacco and establishing pesticide monitoring could help lower the state's high cancer rates and provide more information on its causes.

Charlton told the Register the group will next "layer

in environmental data and some genetic information that's available... to really try and incorporate different types of risk factors into the models."

She said reporting pesticide use, similar to a system in California, would help research.

"I think it's a really important gap," Charlton said. "People want to know what they're exposed to."

The Cancer in Iowa report noted that researchers have found 12% of Iowa private well users had nitrate levels in their drinking water above the federal limit of 10 milligrams per liter.

Unlike public water systems like Central Iowa Water Works, which provides drinking water to 600,000 Des Moines-area residents, private well owners are not regulated under the federal Safe Drinking Water Act, the vehicle for rules like the nitrate limit.

While municipal water systems are regularly monitored, only about 80% of the Iowa farmers in the Agricultural Health Study are estimated to have ever tested their private wells for nitrates.

"There's a good chance that people are just testing their wells every once and awhile, when they should be testing them on a regular basis," Charlton said, adding that Iowa has a program that allows for free testing.

One analysis using the agricultural health data shows nitrate levels above the federal standard were associated with increased risk of prostate cancer, a "particularly aggressive disease," the cancer report said. And another report "suggested that risk of ovarian cancer increased with higher average nitrate levels in drinking water," it said.

The report said that "determining whether an exposure causes cancer requires multiple types of studies. ... A single study alone is usually not enough."

"Iowans are understandably concerned about environmental risk factors, and we hope this report provides helpful context while reinforcing the need for more research," Charlton said in a statement.

The Iowa Capital Dispatch contributed to this report.

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Reynolds

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parent agency, bought the plane with federal COVID-19 relief funds that Congress allocated to state governments to help with the health care and economic challenges that the pandemic caused.

The Iowa Democratic Party has criticized Reynolds' use of the plane. Terra Hernandez, a party spokesperson, said in a Feb. 24 statement that the practice was "disrespectful to Iowa taxpayers."

During a Feb. 26 news conference, Reynolds defended the purchase, telling reporters that DPS Commissioner Stephen Bayens asked for the plane. The Grand Caravan is bigger than the other five planes the State Patrol uses. Among other purposes, Reynolds said, the plane allows a group of officers and K-9s to fly together to drug busts.

Reynolds said she only occasionally uses the Grand Caravan and only flies to official events. Flying allows her to work in Des Moines longer and hold more meetings before traveling, she added.

"I don't feel bad about it," she said during the news conference. "It's how I get out and get into the state and actually accomplish more."

Reynolds told reporters her flights represented "less than 3%" of "the 2025 hours flown." The Grand Caravan's logbook reflects that her flights occupied a larger share of that particular plane's use.

Mason Mauro, a spokesperson for the governor, clarified in an email Wednesday, March 4, that Reynolds was referring to the amount of time she flies as a fraction of total flights in all six of the State Patrol's planes.

Reynolds flew about 54 1/2 hours on state planes in 2025, Mauro said. About 51 1/2 of those hours were likely on another State Patrol plane.

Kim Reynolds' campaign reimbursed the state for travel to political events, spokesperson says

While Reynolds said she uses the plane only for official functions, the dates of some flights in the logbook indicate she has attended political events during those trips. For example, she endorsed U.S. Rep Ashley Hinson for senator at a Sioux City event after flying there in January to visit with students.

Reynolds' predecessor, fellow Republican Terry Branstad, previously told the Register that state officials sold a fleet of planes used for executive travel because maintaining them was a poor way to spend public money. He came under scrutiny during his first term in the 1980s for his frequent flights, sometimes to political events.

In 2025, a couple of months after the purchase of the Grand Caravan, DPS added a new responsibility to the State Patrol's air wing division in an annual report: "executive travel." That responsibility did not appear in previous reports.

The use of a plane to transport a governor is not unique to Iowa, but the practice is expensive. Flying a Grand Caravan costs about \$830 an hour, according to Aviacost, a platform that tracks the price of operating various planes.

Regardless of the expense, Iowa Ethics and Campaign Disclosure Board Executive Director Erica Eckley said the state's rules allow the governor to travel by plane to official events — that is, events that a governor believes she needs to attend to represent Iowa's residents. Often, those events are in public and include business leaders, local government officials and other constituents.

"That's a function of her role as a governor," Eckley said.

For example, the flight log states Reynolds flew in the Grand Caravan to Eden Prairie, Minnesota, on July 17. She later announced in an online post that she pitched her state to business leaders there.

Three weeks later, on Aug. 6, a pilot flew Reynolds to Cedar Rapids, where she attended a groundbreaking for Ingredion, an ingredients manufacturer. Three weeks after that, on Aug. 26, a pilot flew her to Sioux City; she later announced that she had met with the governors of Nebraska and South Dakota.

The log and Reynolds' social media posts show the governor attended a couple of political functions around the state after flying to those communities.

On July 27, she flew to Decorah and attended a meeting with the Allamakee County Republicans. On Oct. 13, Reynolds flew to Fort Dodge and attended the Webster County Republicans' annual chili supper.

Mauro said Reynolds flew into those communities for official meetings with business leaders, local government employees, farmers and a behavioral health provider during those trips. The governor's campaign committee later reimbursed the state for the miles driven from her official events to the political events in those communities, he said.

The committee, Reynolds for Iowa, reimbursed the state a total of \$920 for travel in 2025, according to a campaign finance report. The document does not itemize each trip.

Eckley said reimbursing the state for the specific miles driven between an official event and a political event aligns with a requirement spelled out by the ethics board in a 2011 opinion.

The governor's husband, Kevin Reynolds, flew on the Grand Caravan twice last year, according to the log.

On April 23, he flew with the governor to Spencer, where Mauro said the couple attended an event with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Midwest Fish & Wildlife Association.

On Nov. 14, according to the log, the pilot flew the governor to Waverly. The log does not mention Kevin Reynolds. But the couple attended a Pheasants Forever Banquet hosted by the Butler-Grundy Development Alliance that evening, according to the governor's social media posts.

The next morning, a pilot flew back to Ankeny Re-



Reynolds

gional Airport, where the State Patrol stores the plane. A pilot then flew back to Waverly the same day before returning once again to Ankeny.

In a log, a state official described the purpose of the second flight simply as "First Gentleman." Mauro said the plane supported Kevin Reynolds' role as host of a pheasant hunt that day.

"As first gentleman and the governor's husband, Mr. Reynolds serves in an official capacity and participates in official events," Mauro said.

Eckley said the ethics board has not issued an opinion on whether a governor's spouse can use a state-owned plane.

"It would probably depend on his role, if (the flight's purpose is) personal or related to his role as first gentleman," Eckley said.

About one-third of flights were for pilot training

Because of the redactions, the version of the flight log shared with the Register does not clarify how the Iowa State Patrol generally uses the Grand Caravan.

In its 2025 annual report, DPS officials wrote that the State Patrol air wing division's "core mission" is traffic safety. The officials added that the air wing division also searches for missing people and fugitives, controls traffic during big events, assesses natural disasters, gathers intelligence for tactical teams, moves prisoners, moves executives, monitors drug traffickers and investigates other crimes.

In addition to redacting the purpose of several flights, DPS officials redacted the dates those flights occurred.

Seven of the Grand Caravan flights — about 5% of the plane's total flights — were for transporting inmates or items. A state official logged a May 2 flight as "prisoner relay." A pilot flew to Statesboro, Georgia, Terre Haute, Indiana, and Sioux City during the 6-hour trip, according to ADS-B Exchange, a flight-tracking service.

State Patrol pilots have also spent much of their time flying the Grand Caravan for training — 42 flights spanning about 63 hours, according to the log.

represents 30% of all flights and 20% of total flight time for the Grand Caravan in the period the Register reviewed.

DPS spokespeople did not respond to multiple requests for information about the department's use of the plane.

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