



What's happening to our health? The United States spends more than twice per person on health care than the average of the world's wealthy nations, yet our life expectancy ranks 29<sup>th</sup>. Jordanians live longer. Infant mortality? Thirty nations do better than we do, including Portugal, Slovakia, and South Korea.

Furthermore, research has revealed a gradient to health. At each step down the socio-economic ladder – from the rich to the middle class to the poor – people tend to be sicker and die sooner. Poor Americans die on average five and half years sooner than the middle class. But middle class Americans die almost three years sooner than the rich. And at every step on the socio-economic ladder, African Americans fare worse than their white counterparts. In many cases, so do other people of color. But why?

Former US Surgeon General Dr. David Satcher and colleagues calculated that in 2002, 83,570 African Americans died who would not have if Black and white mortality rates were equal. That's the equivalent of a Boeing 767 loaded with Black passengers being shot out of the sky and killing everyone on board every single day of year.

*UNNATURAL CAUSES: Is Inequality Making Us Sick?* is a four-hour series that, for the first time on television, sounds the alarm about our huge and alarming socio-economic and racial disparities in health – and searches for their causes. And those causes are not what we might expect.

UNNATURAL CAUSES crisscrosses the country, investigating startling new findings that suggest there is much more to our health than bad habits, health care or unlucky genes. While

we spend billions on drugs, dietary supplements and new medical technologies, the series circles in on a slow killer in plain view: the social circumstances in which we are born, live and work can actually get under our skin and affect our risk for disease as surely as germs and viruses.

**Among the clues:**

- It's not top executives who are dropping dead from heart attacks, but their subordinates.
- Experiments with humans and baboons reveal that chronic stress is linked to one's rank in the hierarchy, and can actually change our physiology and heighten our risk for all the chronic diseases—even some cancers.
- The Pima Indians of southern Arizona suffer one of the highest diabetes rates in the world – six times higher than the Mexican Pima across the border.
- Recent Latino immigrants, though typically poorer, enjoy better health than the average American, yet their advantage fades the longer they are here.

As a society, we have a choice: address the conditions that lead us down the path to disease now, or pay to repair our bodies later.

Even before national broadcast, *UNNATURAL CAUSES* began generating significant interest and engagement. Public health departments and more than 250 other outreach partners are organizing screenings, town meetings, and policy forums around the country over the next year. The outreach events, with many opportunities for local stations, are supported by toolkits, a comprehensive companion Web site, with interactivities, video clips, lesson plans, and other resources in coordination with a national press campaign and companion media on radio, TV, Web, and print.

*UNNATURAL CAUSES: Is Inequality Making Us Sick?*  
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