

You're Much More Likely to Be Killed By Lightning than by a Terrorist

By [Washington's Blog](#)

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Region: [USA](#)
Theme: [Terrorism](#)

Calm Down ... You Are Much More Likely to Be Killed By Boring, Mundane Things than Terrorism

Statistics from the Centers for Disease Control show that Americans [are 110 times more likely to die](#) from contaminated food than terrorism. And [see this](#).

The Jewish Daily Forward noted in May that – even including the people killed in the Boston bombing – [you are more likely to be killed by a toddler than a terrorist](#). And see [these statistics](#) from CNN.

The U.S. Department of State reports that only [17](#) U.S. citizens were killed *worldwide* as a result of terrorism in 2011. That figure *includes* deaths in Afghanistan, Iraq and all other theaters of war.

In contrast, the American agency which tracks health-related issues – the U.S. Centers for Disease Control – [rounds up](#) the most prevalent causes of death in the United States:



Comparing the CDC numbers to terrorism deaths means:

- You are [35,079](#) times more likely to die from heart disease than from a terrorist attack
- You are [33,842](#) times more likely to die from cancer than from a terrorist attack

(Keep in mind when reading this entire piece that we are consistently and substantially *understating* the risk of other causes of death as compared to terrorism, because we are comparing deaths from various causes within the United States against deaths from terrorism *worldwide*.)

Wikipedia [notes](#) that obesity is a contributing factor in 100,000–400,000 deaths in the United States per year. That makes obesity [5,882](#) to times [23,528](#) more likely to kill you than a terrorist.

The annual number of deaths in the U.S. due to avoidable medical errors is as high as [100,000](#). Indeed, one of the world's leading medical journals – Lancet – [reported](#) in 2011:

A November, 2010, document from the Office of the Inspector General of the Department of Health and Human Services reported that, when in hospital, one in seven beneficiaries of Medicare (the government-sponsored health-care programme for those aged 65 years and older) have complications from medical errors, which contribute to about 180 000 deaths of patients per year.

That's just Medicare beneficiaries, not the entire American public. Scientific American [noted](#) in 2009:

Preventable medical mistakes and infections are responsible for about 200,000 deaths in the U.S. each year, according to an investigation by the Hearst media corporation.

But let's use the lower – 100,000 – figure. That still means that you are [5,882](#) times more likely to die from medical error than terrorism.

The CDC says that some [80,000](#) deaths each year are attributable to excessive alcohol use. So you're [4,706](#) times more likely to drink yourself to death than die from terrorism.

Wikipedia notes that there were [32,367](#) automobile accidents in 2011, which means that you are [1,904](#) times more likely to die from a car accident than from a terrorist attack. As CNN reporter Fareed Zakaria [wrote](#) last month:

“Since 9/11, foreign-inspired terrorism has claimed about two dozen lives in the United States. (Meanwhile, more than 100,000 have been killed in gun homicides and more than 400,000 in motor-vehicle accidents.) “

President Obama [agreed](#).

According to a 2011 CDC report, poisoning from prescription drugs is even [more likely to kill you](#) than a car crash. Indeed, the CDC stated in 2011 that – in the majority of states – [your prescription meds are more likely to kill you](#) than *any other source of injury*. So your meds are *thousands of times* more likely to kill you than Al Qaeda.

The number of deaths by suicide has [also surpassed car crashes](#), and many connect the increase in suicides [to the downturn in the economy](#). Around [35,000](#) Americans kill themselves each year (and more American soldiers [die by suicide than combat](#); the number of veterans committing suicide is astronomical and [under-reported](#)). So you're [2,059](#) times more likely to kill yourself than die at the hand of a terrorist.

The CDC notes that there were [7,638](#) deaths from HIV and [45](#) from syphilis, so you're [452](#) times more likely to die from risky sexual behavior than terrorism.

The National Safety Council reports that more than [6,000](#) Americans die a year from falls ... most of them involve people falling off their roof or ladder trying to clean their gutters, put up Christmas lights and the like. That means that you're [353](#) times more likely to fall to your death doing something idiotic than die in a terrorist attack.

The agency in charge of workplace safety – the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration – reports that [4,609](#) workers were killed on the job in 2011 within the U.S.

homeland. In other words, you are [271](#) times more likely to die from a workplace accident than terrorism.

The CDC notes that [3,177](#) people died of “nutritional deficiencies” in 2011, which means you are [187](#) times more likely to starve to death in American than be killed by terrorism.

Scientific American [notes](#):

You might have toxoplasmosis, an infection caused by the microscopic parasite *Toxoplasma gondii*, which the CDC estimates has infected about 22.5 percent of Americans older than 12 years old

Toxoplasmosis is a brain-parasite. The CDC reports that more than [375](#) Americans die annually due to toxoplasmosis. In addition, [3](#) Americans died in 2011 after being exposed to a brain-eating amoeba. So you’re about [22](#) times more likely to die from a brain-eating zombie parasite than a terrorist.

There were at least [155](#) Americans killed by police officers in the United States in 2011. That means that you were more than [9](#) times more likely to be killed by a law enforcement officer than by a terrorist.

And the 2011 Report on Terrorism from the National Counter Terrorism Center notes that Americans are [just as likely](#) to be “crushed to death by their televisions or furniture each year” as they are to be killed by terrorists.

Reason [notes](#):

[The risk of being killed by terrorism] [compares annual risk of dying](#) in a car accident of 1 in 19,000; drowning in a bathtub at 1 in 800,000; dying in a building fire at 1 in 99,000; or being struck by lightning at 1 in 5,500,000. In other words, in the last five years you were four times more likely to be struck by lightning than killed by a terrorist.

The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) has just published, [Background Report: 9/11, Ten Years Later](#) [PDF]. The report notes, excluding the 9/11 atrocities, that fewer than 500 people died in the U.S. from terrorist attacks between 1970 and 2010.

Scientific American [reported](#) in 2011:

John Mueller, a political scientist at Ohio State University, and Mark Stewart, a civil engineer and authority on risk assessment at University of Newcastle in Australia ... contended, “a great deal of money appears to have been misspent and would have been far more productive—saved far more lives—if it had been expended in other ways.”

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