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## Lack of insurance hurts in hospital

### Two studies: Mortality rates higher for poor

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Even inside a hospital, not having an insurance card is particularly hazardous to a patient's health.

Two recent studies underscore the risks.

One study, done by researchers at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, found significant differences in hospital mortality rates for several conditions between working-age adults (ages 18 to 64) who had health insurance versus those who did not.

Specifically, hospital mortality risks for uninsured heart-attack and stroke patients were 52 percent and 49 percent higher, respectively, than among those with private insurance, while death rates from pneumonia were 21 percent higher among hospitalized patients covered through Medicaid, the federal-state insurance program for the poor.

The findings, published in *The Journal of Hospital Medicine*, were based on an analysis of more than 150,000 hospital-discharge records for patients admitted in 2005 with one of the three diagnoses.

A second study, done by emergency physicians at the University of Buffalo, involved analyzing nearly 200,000 patient records from 649 hospitals that treated them for trauma between 2001 and 2005.

It found that patients without insurance were more likely to die from auto-accident and gunshot wounds than privately insured patients with similar injuries. But the researchers found that Medicaid patients injured in vehicle accidents actually had lower death rates than those with private coverage, suggesting that factors other than the rate of payment for services — Medicaid rates are lower — are influencing the outcomes in trauma care.

The results of the Buffalo study were presented in early June at the annual meeting of the Society for Academic Emergency Medicine in Phoenix.

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