

HPV improves survival for African-Americans with throat cancer

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Even though the human papillomavirus (HPV) is a risk factor for certain head and neck cancers, its presence could make all the difference in terms of survival, especially for African Americans with throat cancer, say Henry Ford Hospital researchers.

According to their new study, HPV has a substantial impact on overall survival in African Americans with oropharyngeal cancer, a cancer that affects part of the throat, the base of the tongue, the tonsils, the [soft palate](#) (back of the mouth), and the walls of the pharynx (throat).

The study shows African Americans who are HPV positive have better outcomes than African Americans without HPV.

Further, African Americans who are HPV negative not only have poorer survival compared to African Americans with HPV, they also did worse than [Caucasians](#) both with HPV and without HPV present in oropharyngeal cancer.

"This study adds to the mounting evidence of HPV as a racially-linked [sexual behavior](#) lifestyle risk factor impacting survival outcomes for both African American and [Caucasian patients](#) with oropharyngeal cancer," says lead author Maria J. Worsham, Ph.D., director of research in the Department of Otolaryngology-Head & Neck Surgery at Henry Ford.

Study results will be presented Sunday, July 22 at the 8th International

Conference on Head & Neck Cancer in Toronto. The research was funded by a National Institutes of Health grant.

The American Cancer Society's estimates about 35,000 people in the U.S. will get oral cavity and oropharyngeal cancers in 2012; an estimated 6,800 people will die of these cancers.

Similar to other cancers of the head and neck cancer, risk factors include smoking, alcohol consumption. HPV is also a risk factor for oropharyngeal cancer.

To compare [survival outcomes](#) in HPV positive and HPV negative African Americans with oropharyngeal cancer, Dr. Worsham and her team conducted a retrospective study of 118 patients.

Among the study group, 67 are HPV negative and 51 are HPV positive. Forty-two of those in the study are African American.

The study found that:

- African Americans are less likely to be HPV positive
- Those older than 50 are less likely to be HPV positive
- Those with late-stage oropharyngeal cancer are more likely to be unmarried and more likely to be HPV positive
- HPV negative patients had 2.9 times the risk of death as HPV positive patients
- Overall, the HPV race groups differed with significantly poorer survival for HPV negative African Americans versus HPV positive African Americans, HPV positive Caucasians and HPV negative Caucasians

Provided by Henry Ford Health System

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