

# Americans' risk of dying from cancer is falling, CDC finds

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But, due to aging population, actual number of cancer deaths is rising.

(HealthDay)—The risk that any one American will die from cancer—the cancer death rate—is going down, regardless of sex or race, a new government study reports.

However, because the United States has a growing aging population, the overall *number* of people dying from cancer is on the rise, officials from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported.

"While we are making progress in reducing cancer death rates, we still have real work to do to reduce cancer deaths among our aging population," said lead researcher Mary White, a scientist in the CDC's division of cancer prevention and control.

Between 2007 and 2020, cancer deaths are expected to rise more than 10 percent among men and black women, the report found. Among white

women, the number of cancer deaths will start to stabilize, increasing less than 5 percent during this period, according to the CDC researchers.

"Further declines in cancer deaths might be achieved if we can reach other national targets for addressing risk factors," White said.

These include cutting exposure to tobacco and UV radiation, increasing cancer screening for early detection, and improving access to health care to increase early treatment and survival, she said.

White said that a decline in cancer death rates—even as the actual number of cancer deaths rises—is not a paradox.

"Death rates are calculated by dividing the number of cancer deaths by the number of people in the population," she explained.

The number of older adults continues to grow, White explained.

"Because death rates for many cancers increase with age, the number of people who die from cancer is also predicted to grow, even while death rates decline," she said.

Dr. David Katz, director of the Yale University Prevention Research Center in New Haven, Conn., agreed that reducing cancer deaths and reducing cancer are not the same.

"Cancer death rates are declining markedly, which is excellent news and testimony to the power of [early detection](#) and improving treatments," said Katz, who was not involved with the study.

And Dr. Rich Wender, the chief cancer control officer at the American Cancer Society, said, "We have made substantial progress for many of the common adult cancers. The key to that progress is applying research about how to prevent cancer, how to detect it early and treat it

effectively."

The report is published in the July issue of the journal *Preventing Chronic Disease*.

According to the study findings, between 1975 and 2009, the number of cancer deaths increased 45.5 percent among white men, 56 percent among white women, 53 percent among black men and 98 percent among black women.

These increases are primarily attributed to an aging white population and an increasing black population, White said. This pattern is likely to continue, she added.

The government's Healthy People 2020 initiative set a goal of reducing the rate of cancer deaths by 10 to 15 percent for some cancers by 2020. This target was met for prostate cancer in 2010, the study authors said.

Researchers expect to meet the goal for breast, cervix, colon and rectum, lung and bronchus cancers in 2015. The [death rates](#) for cancers of the oral cavity and pharynx seem to be stabilizing, the report said.

However, the goal for melanoma is not expected to be achieved. "It's discouraging to find out that we aren't reducing deaths from melanoma, the most deadly form of skin cancer," White said.

"We know that most cases of melanoma are preventable," she said. "To lower your skin cancer risk, protect your skin from the sun and avoid indoor tanning."

White suggested the people can lower their own risk of dying from cancer by learning about screening tests and other steps they can take to prevent cancer.

"While we have seen improvements to lower cancer deaths, everyone can learn about screening tests and the [cancer prevention](#) steps that are right for them," she said.

Katz pointed out that "back in 1981, researchers first highlighted the substantial preventability of [cancer](#) by changing one's lifestyle. Most authorities remain convinced that 30 to 60 percent of cancers could be prevented by avoiding tobacco, having a healthy diet, routine activity and weight control."

**More information:** For more about cancer prevention, visit the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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