

# Rural appalachia faces growing cancer crisis, research shows

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(HealthDay)—While the rest of the United States makes major strides

against cancer, a cancer crisis is taking hold in rural Appalachia.

A University of Virginia (UVA) team analyzed federal government data and found that between 1969 and 2011, cancer rates fell in every U.S. region except rural Appalachia.

Over the study period, rural Appalachia went from having the nation's lowest cancer death rate to the highest. Cancer [death rates](#) were nearly 15 percent higher in Virginia's rural Appalachian counties than in non-Appalachian urban areas nationwide. In rural Appalachian areas of Kentucky, cancer death rates rose 36 percent.

Rural residents in every state in the Appalachian region, except Maryland, had higher [cancer death](#) rates than their urban counterparts, the study found.

"Almost 40 percent more cancer mortalities [in rural Kentucky] than in the other United States. I think that's crazy," researcher Nengliang (Aaron) Yao said in a university news release.

In addition, people in Appalachia are more likely to die within three to five years of their cancer diagnoses than people in urban areas outside the region, and breast cancer is less likely to be caught early, the researchers said.

Yao cited several economic, geographic and political barriers to quality [cancer](#) care in the region.

"They don't use a lot of [health](#) care. It means they don't spend a lot of CMS [U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services] money, and if you don't spend, you won't be considered high-cost patients," said Yao. He is an assistant professor of public health sciences in the School of Medicine and the UVA Cancer Center.

"If you're not high-cost patients, it is hard to draw attention from policymakers and payers," Yao added.

Other problems include widespread poverty, high levels of smoking and obesity, and poor access to health care, the study authors noted.

The study was published recently in the *Journal of Rural Health*.

**More information:** The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [cancer](#).

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