

US cancer death rates are falling, but news isn't all good

January 17 2024, by Dennis Thompson



Cancer deaths continue to decline in the United States, with more than 4

million deaths prevented since 1991, a new report shows.

But more people are developing cancers than ever, making the dreaded disease a continued threat to [human health](#), according to the [new report](#) published Jan. 17 by the American Cancer Society (ACS).

New cancer diagnoses are projected to top 2 million for the first time in 2024, up from 1.9 million last year. Further, [cancer patients](#) are getting younger.

Diagnoses in middle-aged folks (50 to 64) increased from 25% in 1995 to 30% in 2020, at the same time diagnoses in seniors 65 and older decreased from 61% to 58%, the ACS said.

"We're encouraged by the steady drop in [cancer mortality](#) as a result of less smoking, earlier detection for some cancers and improved treatment," said lead report author [Rebecca Siegel](#), senior scientific director of surveillance research at the American Cancer Society.

"But as a nation, we've dropped the ball on [cancer prevention](#) as incidence continues to increase for many common cancers—like breast, prostate, and endometrial, as well as colorectal and cervical cancers in some [young adults](#)," Siegel added in an ACS news release.

Higher obesity is driving some of the increased cancer incidence in people born after the 1950s, along with other as-yet-unknown factors, the ACS said.

In another shift toward the young, people under 50 are battling [colorectal cancer](#) more frequently, the report says.

Colon cancer had been the fourth leading cause of cancer death in both younger men and women two decades ago.

Now it's the number one cause of cancer death in younger men, and second in women only to breast cancer.

"The continuous sharp increase in colorectal cancer in younger Americans is alarming," said senior study author [Dr. Ahmedin Jemal](#), senior vice president of surveillance and health equity science at the American Cancer Society. "We need to halt and reverse this trend by increasing uptake of screening, including awareness of noninvasive stool tests with follow-up care, in people 45-49 years."

"Up to one-third of people diagnosed before 50 have a family history or genetic predisposition and should begin screening before age 45 years," Jemal added. "We also need to increase investment to elucidate the underlying reasons for the rising incidence, to uncover additional preventive measures."

Racial disparities also continue to hamper progress against the disease, the report said. Compared to whites, Black Americans have twice the death rate for prostate, stomach and [endometrial cancers](#), and Native Americans have a doubled death rate for liver, stomach and kidney cancers, the report said.

In one example, steeper increases in [endometrial cancer](#) among women of color have made it one of the few forms of cancer that continues to kill more people each year.

Overall [death rates](#) for endometrial cancer continue to increase 2% each year. The death rate is now two times higher in Black women (9.1 deaths per 100,000) than in white women (4.6 per 100,000).

"This report underscores the need for public policy interventions to help reduce these cancer disparities and save more lives," said [Lisa Lacasse](#), president of ACS's advocacy affiliate, the American Cancer Society

Cancer Action Network.

In another piece of good news, cervical cancer cases are declining steeply in women in their 20s, the first wave to receive the new HPV vaccine.

However, cases increased by 1.7% per year in women ages 30 to 44 between 2012 and 2019, highlighting the need for continued screening.

More information: Rebecca L. Siegel et al, Cancer statistics, 2024, *CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians* (2024). [DOI: 10.3322/caac.21820](https://doi.org/10.3322/caac.21820)

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Citation: US cancer death rates are falling, but news isn't all good (2024, January 17) retrieved 9 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-01-cancer-death-falling-news-isnt.html>

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