# FACTS ON CANCER AMONG HISPANICS/LATINOS IN THE U.S.

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## Introduction

Cancer is a term used to describe more than 100 different but related diseases. Cancer typically develops when cells become abnormal and continue dividing and forming more cells. When cells keep dividing they form a mass of tissue known as a tumor. The tumor can be benign or malignant. When benign, tumors are not cancerous and can be removed surgically and usually do not re-form or spread to other parts of the body. When the tumor is malignant, cancer cells typically invade and damage nearby tissues and organs. They can also break away from the malignant tumor and enter the bloodstream or the lymphatic system forming new tumors or metastasis in other parts of the body.
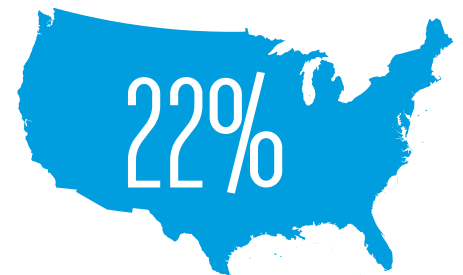
Cancer is the leading cause of death among Hispanics/Latinos. Approximately, 22% of all causes of death among Hispanics/Latinos in the U.S is attributed to cancer. Approximately 1 in 3 Hispanic/Latino Men and 1 in 3 Hispanic/Latina women will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime. It is estimated that 25% of cancers diagnosed in Latinos are among individuals younger than 50 years old compared to only 12% in non-Hispanic whites. The lifetime probability of dying from cancer is 1 in 5 for Hispanic/Latino men and 1 in 6 for Hispanic/Latina women.

**Cancer in Latino Men:** Prostate Cancer is the most commonly diagnosed type of cancer in Hispanic/Latino men (22% of new cases), followed by colorectal cancer (second) and lung cancer (third).

**Cancer in Latina Women:** Breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed type of cancer in Hispanic/ Latina women followed by thyroid (second) and colorectal cancer (third).

**Trends in Cancer Epidemiology:** The most recent data from 2003 to 2012 shows that the incidence rates for all cancers combined among men decreased by an average of 2.4% per year. For women, the decreased was 0.5% per year. Death rates for all cancers combined among Hispanics/Latinos also decreased from 2003 to 2012 by an average of 1.5% per year for men and by 1.0% per year in women. Hispanics have comparatively low rates for the most common types of cancer (breast cancer, colorectal cancer, and lung cancer) in comparison to other ethnic/racial groups because of better screening, diagnosis, and treatment advances. However, Hispanics have disproportionately higher rates of cancers related to infectious agents including cancer of the liver, cancer of the stomach, uterine/cervix cancer as well as gallbladder cancer when compared to other racial/ethnic groups.

**Children and Adolescents:** Approximately, 2,700 Hispanic children (ages 0 – 14 years) in the U.S. will be diagnosed with cancer (prediction for 2015) accounting for 2.1% of cancer cases in Hispanics.



**22%**

APPROXIMATELY, 22% OF ALL CAUSES OF DEATH AMONG HISPANICS/LATINOS IN THE U.S IS ATTRIBUTED TO CANCER.

1) PROSTATE CANCER
2) COLORECTAL CANCER
3) LUNG CANCER

1) BREAST CANCER
2) THYROID CANCER
3) COLORECTAL CANCER
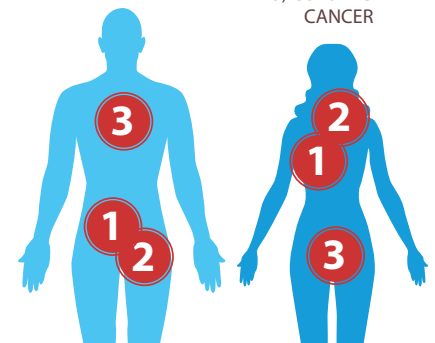


3 MOST COMMONLY DIAGNOSED TYPE OF CANCER FOR HISPANIC MEN AND WOMEN



HISPANICS HAVE HIGHER RATES OF CANCERS RELATED TO INFECTIOUS AGENTS SUCH: CANCER OF THE LIVER AND CANCER OF THE STOMACH AMONG OTHERS.

# Prevention

It is estimated that more than half of the 600,900 cancer deaths in the United States in 2017 were preventable if individuals did more exercise, weighed less and ate more healthier foods. If individuals avoid ultraviolet light (sun damage) and quit smoking the number of cancer cases will drastically decrease.

Cancer causing pathogens like Hepatitis B virus and the Human Papillomavirus in many instances can be prevented with vaccination.

Adopting healthier lifestyles that eliminate or reduce the risk of some of the already recognized causes of cancer, could decrease the number of people diagnosed with many types of cancer. Moreover, healthier approaches to living can reduce the risk of cancer recurrences and improve outcomes during treatment.

Smoking causes about 30 percent of all U.S. deaths from cancer. Avoiding tobacco use is the single most important step we can take to reduce the incidence and the burden of cancer.

Poor diet, lack of physical activity, obesity (being overweight) are known risk factors for many chronic diseases and conditions, and are estimated to account for 25 percent to 30 percent of cancers in the U.S.

# Cancer Prevention Tips

A substantial proportion of cancers could be prevented if individuals adopt healthier lifestyles. Here are some tips to minimize the risks associated with certain cancers.

**Avoid Tobacco –** smoking has been linked to various types of cancers, including cancer of the lung, mouth, throat, larynx, pancreas, bladder, cervix and kidneys. Chewing tobacco has been linked to cancer of the oral cavity and pancreas. Even if you don't use tobacco, exposure to secondhand smoke might increase your risk of lung cancer.

If you decide to avoid the use of tobacco, you are making a healthy decision that could help you prevent cancer. If you would like to quit smoking, your doctor can assist you by providing information on products  that can help you in your efforts to quit smoking.

**Eat a healthy diet-** Eat fresh fruits and vegetables as well as whole grains and beans consistently as part of your nutritional habits.

**Avoid obesity –** Eat food with less calories, avoid refined sugars as well as avoid fat from animal sources.

**Avoid alcohol or drink alcohol in moderation.** The risk of developing various types of cancer including breast cancer, colon, lung, kidney and liver cancer, increases depending on the amount of alcohol you drink and the length of the time you've been drinking.

**Limit the consumption of processed meats -** Eating large amounts of processed meat can slightly increase the risk of certain types of cancer. A diet that is supplemented with extra-virgin olive oils, mixed nuts, fresh fruit, grains, legumes and fish instead of red meat can reduce the risk of breast cancer.

**Maintain a healthy weight and be physically active -** Maintaining a healthy weight might lower the risk of various types of cancer, including breast cancer, prostate, lung, colon and kidney cancer. Physical activity can provide substantial health benefits. For example, moderate physical activity for about 30 minutes a day can lower the chances of developing certain cancers.

**Avoid sun exposure –** Skin cancer is very common, and it is also one of the most preventable types of cancer. By avoiding exposure to the sun from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm can help prevent skin cancer. Stay in the shade and cover exposed skin. It is recommended that you use sunscreen when outdoors and re-apply as necessary. Avoid sun tanning beds and sunlamps since they can cause similar damage as the natural sunlight.

**Use preventive vaccines-** certain viral infections can cause cancer. Available vaccines can assist you in preventing Hepatitis B which can cause liver cancer and Human Papillomavirus, a sexually transmitted virus that can lead to cervical and other genital cancers.

**Avoid risky sexual behavior –** Limiting the number of sexual partners and using condoms consistently can help prevent sexually transmitted infections like HIV and the Human Papillomavirus. People living with HIV/AIDS are more prone to develop anal, liver and lung cancer. It is also recommended to avoid sharing needles in order to prevent HIV, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C, since these infections can increase the risk of liver cancer.

**Seek regular medical care –** Visiting your doctor regularly can help prevent the development of cancer by doing screenings and regular exams. Talking with your doctor during a medical visit can potentially increase the chances of discovering cancer earlier. Early detection of cancer can enhance the chances of a successful treatment or to prevent cancer from developing in the first place. Make sure you tell your doctor about any family history of cancer.

## The importance of Cancer screening and Early Detection

Cancer screening can assist medical providers to detect cancer at an earlier stage. Screening procedures can have lifesaving benefits if done early. There is evidence that the pre-cancerous stage in cervical cancer can be detected at an early stage using a simple cervical smear test (pap tests). Women are encouraged to attend regular smear tests to prevent this type of cancer or its progression. It has been established that the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is the main risk factor for cervical cancer and the virus is usually spread through sexual activity. Women are more likely to undergo screening with PAP smears or mammograms to detect breast cancer if they see a female doctor than a male doctor.

Another example of the benefits of screening and early detection for both males and females is screening for colorectal cancer by a colonoscopy procedure. A colonoscopy can detect this form of cancer at an early stage. Preventive measures like removing precancerous polyps in the colorectal area of the body can prevent these polyps from eventually becoming cancerous.

Screening can also help prevent cervical cancers by detecting and removing pre-cancerous growths. The detection of cancer at an early stage increase the chances of a more successful treatment. Screening can assist a medical provider to detect breast cancer, colorectal cancer, cervical cancer, and lung cancer (particularly for long-term or heavy smokers) at an early stage.

## Types of Cancer Disproportionately affecting Latinos

Approximately 58,400 new cancer cases in Hispanic/Latino men and 67,500 cases of Hispanic/Latina women were diagnosed with cancer in the United States in 2015. It was estimated that about 19,900 men and 17,900 women probably die from cancer in the same year (2015).

Hispanics/Latinos are disproportionately affected by certain types of cancer. US-born Latinos are disproportionately affected by liver cancer with rates that are more than double when compared with Non-Latino Whites. Liver cancer has been one of the top four main causes of cancer death for both US-born and foreign-born male and female Latino(a)s. Lung cancer accounted for approximately 17% of cancer deaths in Hispanic/Latino men, followed by liver cancer (12%) and colorectal cancer (11%). In Hispanic Men, prostate cancer will be the fourth most common cause of cancer death in Hispanic/Latino men. In Puerto Rico (a U.S. territory) the rates of prostate cancer are higher than those in the mainland U.S. (150 per 100,00 individuals versus 128 per 100,000 individuals in the year 2011.

Among Hispanic/Latina women, breast cancer will be the leading cause of cancer death (16%), followed be lung cancer (13%) and colorectal cancer (9%).

## Cancer treatment

Cancer can be treated with surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy, or with hormone therapy (drugs that specifically target cancer cells to prevent growth).

## Psychological support for cancer

Cancer causes anxiety and depression in more than one-third of patients. Providing supportive services like support groups can assist many patient's experiencing distress and the anxiety associated with a cancer diagnosis.

## Advocacy

Most cancer data in the U.S. are reported for Hispanics as an aggregate group, limiting the ability to segregate data describing important differences between Hispanic sub-populations like those who are foreign born versus those born in the United States, the degree of acculturation (the overall cancer death rates were 22% higher among US-born Hispanic/Latino men than foreign-born Hispanic/Latino men) and country of origin.

It is important to highlight that the existing data collection systems in the U.S. does not take into consideration data on the health of Latin American indigenous groups emigrating to the United States as well as the lack of data on Latino migrant farmworkers. Capturing information regarding these populations will likely reveal that the health-related outcomes would appear much worse if these data were included in national data/information systems. There is a great need to promote policy changes in terms of data surveillance, prevention, treatment, and overall survival data.

**REFERENCES:**

American Cancer Society (2015). *Cancer facts & figures for Hispanics/Latinos 2015-2017*. American cancer Society, Atlanta, GA.