

End of Life

The ultimate measure of our Nation's success against cancer is how far we can lower the death rate from this group of dread diseases. This final section of *Cancer Progress Report 2001* provides national data not only on cancer mortality by major sites, but also in terms of years of life lost to cancer—a measure that emphasizes the tragedy of common cancers that strike people at a relatively young age.

As highlighted at the beginning of this report, the news is good. For the first time since the Government began collecting mortality data early in the last century, cancer death rates began to decline in 1992. It is our job as a Nation to maintain and accelerate this trend. Future editions of this report will continue to document how we are doing in the ongoing battle against deaths from cancer.

END OF LIFE

Key Word: Mortality

Mortality

After several decades of steady increases, cancer death rates began to decline in the early 1990s.

Measuring Cancer Deaths

In 1998, cancers of the breast, prostate, lung, and colon/rectum accounted for more than half of all cancer deaths in the United States. Lung cancer alone claimed more than one-fourth of the lives lost to cancer. It is projected that in 2001, there will be 553,400 cancer deaths overall, including 157,400 deaths from lung cancer; 56,700 from cancers of the colon/rectum; 40,200 from female breast cancer; and 31,500 from prostate cancer.

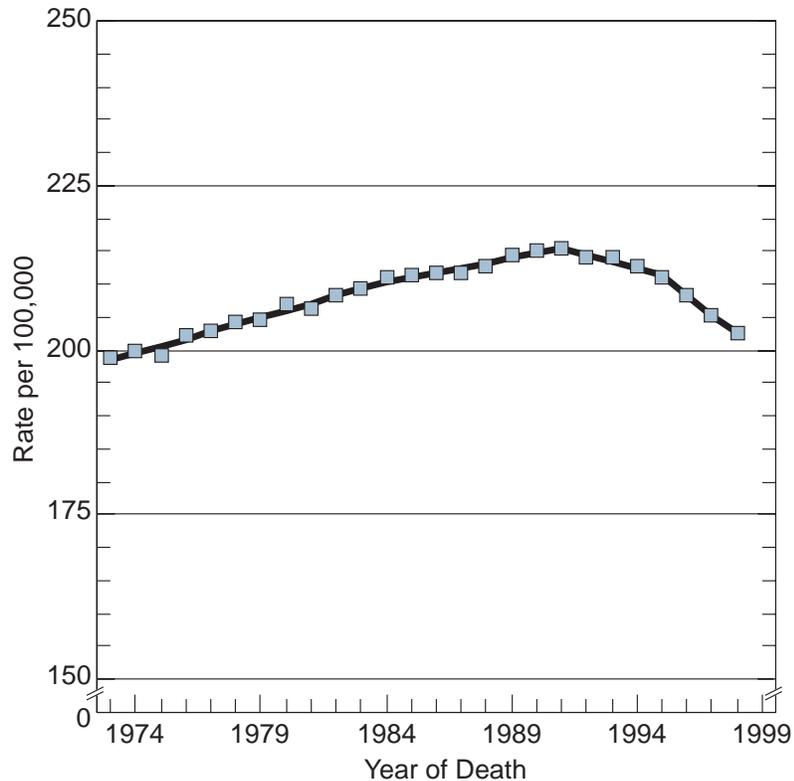
Cancer mortality usually is measured as the annual number of deaths from cancer for every 100,000 people.

Measure

Mortality rate: The number of cancer deaths per 100,000 people per year.

Period – 1973-1998

Figure 24: Rates of Deaths for All Cancers—1973-1998



Source: National Center for Health Statistics data as analyzed by the National Cancer Institute. Rates are per 100,000 population and age-adjusted by 5-year age groups to the 2000 U.S. standard million.

Trends – Falling slightly

Cancer death rates rose over the long term until the mid-1980s, when they became stable. The rates began falling in the early 1990s. (Figure 24.)

Death rates for the four most common cancers began to fall between 1984 and 1991 (Figure 25).

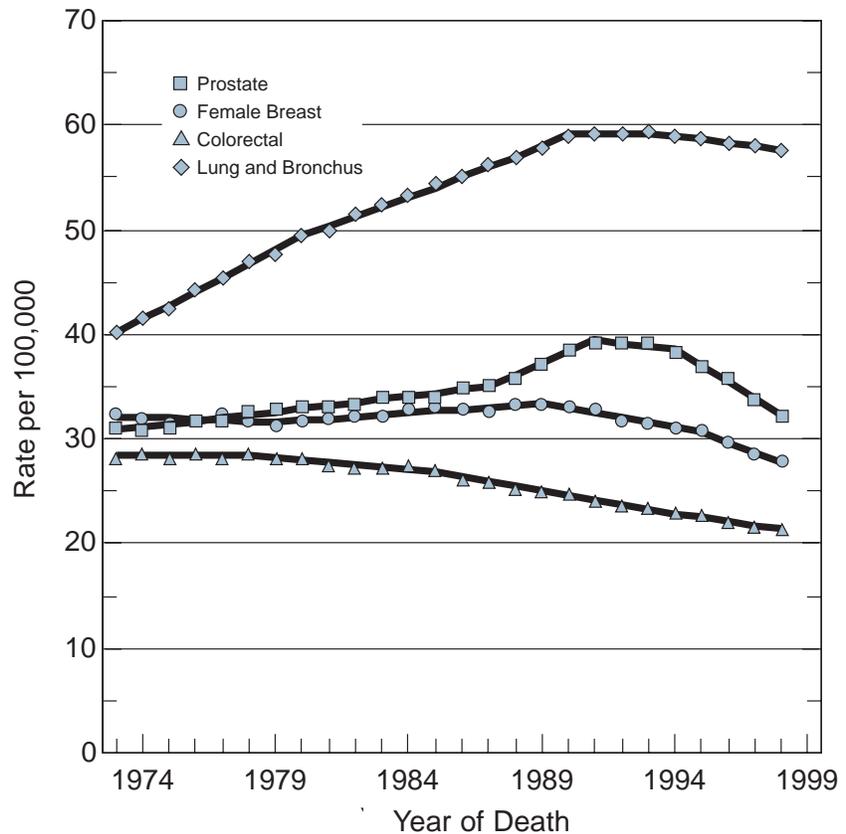
Most Recent Estimate

In 1998, the death rate for all cancers was 202.6 per 100,000 people (Figure 24).

Healthy People 2010 Target

Reduce the overall cancer death rate to 159.9 cancer deaths per 100,000 people.

Figure 25: Cancer Death Rates for Common Cancers—1973-1998



Source: National Center for Health Statistics data as analyzed by the National Cancer Institute. Rates are per 100,000 population and age-adjusted by 5-year age groups to the 2000 U.S. standard million.

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Key Word: Mortality

Mortality *(continued)*

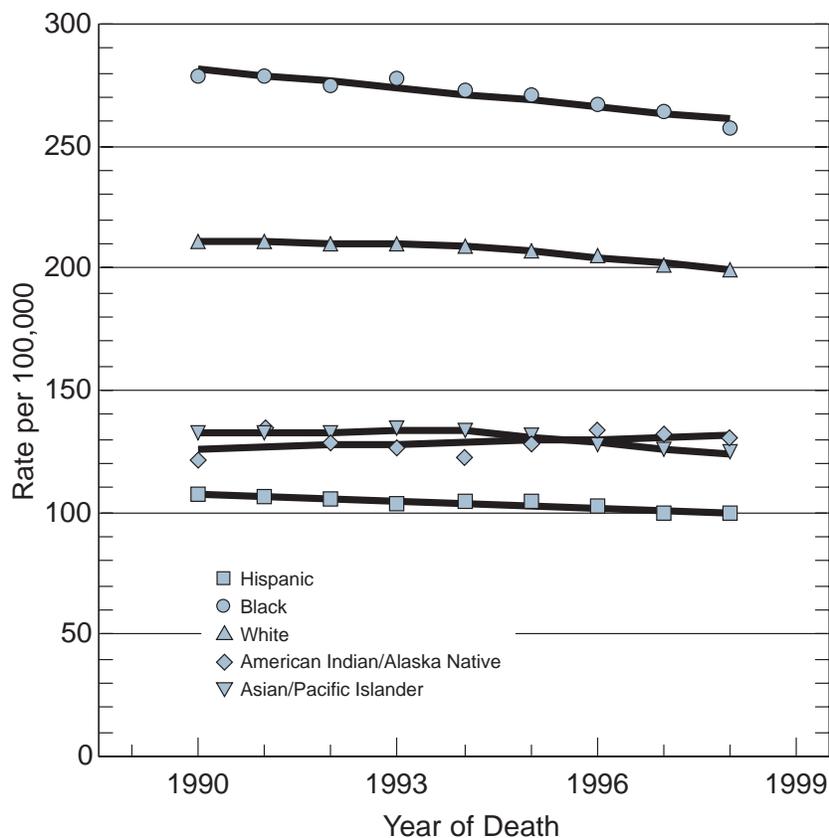
Groups at High Risk for Cancer Deaths

Blacks have the highest overall rates for cancer deaths, followed by Whites (*Figure 26*).

Key Issues

Although overall death rates are on the decline, deaths from some cancers, such as esophageal and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, are increasing. Death rates among American Indians/Alaska Natives also are increasing.

Figure 26: Rates of Deaths for All Cancers, by Race/Ethnicity—1990-1998



Source: National Center for Health Statistics data as analyzed by the National Cancer Institute.

Rates are per 100,000 population and age-adjusted by 5-year age groups to the 2000 U.S. standard million.

Person-Years of Life Lost

Cancer is responsible for more estimated years of life lost than any other cause of death.



Person-Years of Life Lost to Cancer

Mortality rates alone do not give a complete picture of the burden of cancer deaths. Another useful measure is person-years of life lost (PYLL)—the years of life lost due to early death from a particular cause. PYLL helps to describe the extent to which life is cut short by cancer. On average, each person who dies from cancer loses an estimated 15 years of life.

Measure

PYLL due to cancer: The difference between the actual age of death due to a cancer and the expected age of death.

Period – 1998

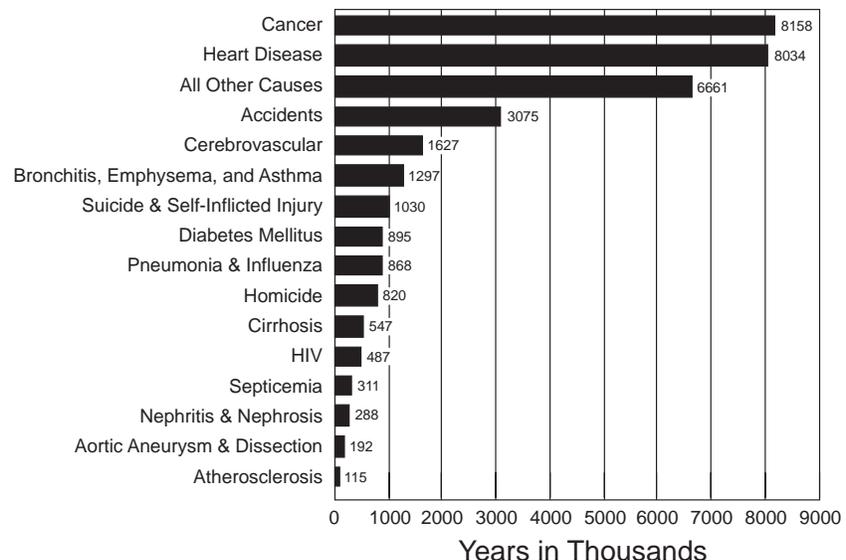
Trend – No trend data are available.

Most Recent Estimates

In 1998, cancer deaths were responsible for 8 million PYLL. This is more than heart disease or any other cause of death. (Figure 27.)

Also in 1998, among cancers, lung cancer accounted for 2 million PYLL, the most by far of any cancer. In contrast, prostate cancer, which primarily affects older men, accounted for fewer than 300,000 PYLL. (Figure 28.)

Figure 27: Person-Years of Life Lost Due to Major Causes of Death in U.S.—1998



Source: National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) public-use file and NCHS 1997 Life Tables.

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Key Word: PYLL

Person-Years of Life Lost (continued)

Healthy People 2010 Target

There is no Healthy People 2010 target for this measure.

Groups at High Risk for the Most PYLL

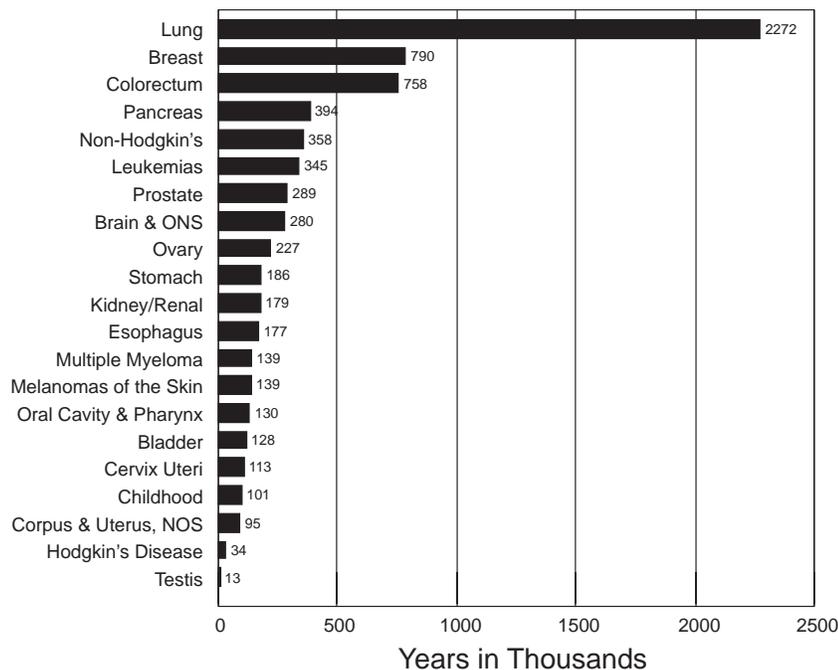
Cancers that are both common and from which there is poor survival are responsible for the most PYLL. Breast and colorectal cancers are also common cancers that strike people at a relatively young age and cause many years of life lost.

Deaths from childhood cancers, which are uncommon, lead to the most years of life lost for the individual child, but contribute only a small percentage to total PYLL.

Key Issues

The greatest impact on reducing the number of years lost to cancer will come from progress against common cancers—especially lung, breast, and colorectal cancers.

Figure 28: Person-Years of Life Lost Due to Cancer—1998



Source: National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) public-use file and NCHS 1997 Life Tables.