

What is cancer?

Cancer is a general term used to describe cells that grow in an uncontrolled way. This growth is the result of changes in the genetic control of cell division.

Cancer cells are capable of crossing normal cell boundaries and moving to surrounding areas. They can get into the blood and drainage systems and spread (metastasise) to other parts of the body. Cancer cells can also establish secondary growths (tumours).

- More than 100 different types of cancer have been identified
- Each cancer type different patterns of development age and gender-related
- Some cancers are more aggressive than others
- Each cancer has different causes
- Each cancer has different possibilities for prevention
- Each cancer has different responses to treatment

Cancer Incidence and mortality

Excluding non-melanoma skin cancers (NMSC), there were 100,514 new cancer cases in Australia in 2005 and 39,097 deaths from the disease.

In Tasmania, there were 2,737 non-melanoma skin cancers diagnosed in 2005 and 1,051 cancer-related deaths across all cancers.

At current rates, it is expected that 1 in 2 men and 1 in 3 women will be diagnosed with cancer before the age of 85.

The risk of getting cancer increases with age.

Tasmania has the second highest cancer rate in Australia.

Most common cancers

After non-melanoma skin cancer, the most common cancer in Australian men is prostate cancer and in women breast cancer. These are followed in both sexes by colorectal (bowel) cancer, melanoma and lung cancer.

Lung cancer is the most common cause of cancer deaths in Australia, followed by colorectal, prostate and breast cancer.

Living with cancer

At the end of 2004, there were 654,977 Australians living with cancer. This represents 3.2% of the population.

Who gets what?

Cancer incidence varies with age:

- In people under 15 years, the most common cancers are leukaemias and cancers of the brain and nervous system
- From ages 15 to 44 years, the most common cancers are melanoma and breast cancer

- In people aged 45+, the most common cancers are breast, colorectal, melanoma, prostate and lung cancer

Preventable Cancers

In 2005, it is estimated that over 11,000 new cases of cancer and over 8,000 cancer deaths in Australia were caused by smoking. Nearly 3,000 new cases of cancer and over 1,300 cancer deaths were estimated to be caused by excessive consumption of alcohol.

In 2005 there were over 10,000 cases of melanoma in Australia with around 1,200 deaths. In 2002 about 374,000 people were diagnosed with NMSC and in 2006, 410 people died from NMSC. These cancers account for more hospital admissions than any other cancer type! The vast majority of skin cancers are due to excess sun exposure, and are thus preventable.

The good news

The relative survival rates for people diagnosed with cancer have improved between 1982-1986 and 1998-2004. For males, the survival rate has increased from 41 to 58 per cent and for women survival has increased from 53 to 64 per cent. These differences may be attributed to improvements in early detection and treatment of many cancers, the effect of screening programs and a decline in the prevalence of smoking.

To reduce your cancer risk

- Don't smoke
- Avoid second hand tobacco smoke
- Be SunSmart
- Be active
- Stay a healthy weight
- Avoid or limit alcohol
- Eat a healthy diet

To find cancer early before symptoms appear...

Screening is recommended for

Breast Cancer	target age 50-69
Bowel Cancer	target age 50+
Cervical Cancer	target age 18+

SOURCES

Australian Institute of Health & Welfare 2008. Cancer In Australia; an overview. 2008. Canberra: AIHW

Tasmanian Cancer Registry 2008 Cancer In Tasmania: Incidence & Mortality 2005, Hobart: Tasmanian Cancer Registry

CANCER STATISTICS AND FACTS