

CANCER IN THE REGION OF THE AMERICAS

KEY STATISTICS

- In 2008, 1.2 million people died from cancer, representing about a third of all deaths in the Region of the Americas.
- The number of cancer deaths in the Americas is projected to increase from 1.2 million to 2.1 million between 2008 and 2030.
- About 45% of the cancer deaths in the Americas in 2008 occurred in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- Cervical cancer mortality rates are seven times higher in Latin America and the Caribbean than in North America, highlighting health disparities.
- About 30% of the cancer deaths could be avoided by changes in lifestyle and healthier behaviors.
- The vast majority of cancer deaths are preventable: for example, every year over 250,000 people in the Americas die from cancer linked to tobacco.
- Vaccination against the human papilloma virus (HPV) and screening for pre-cancer or cancer are key tools to prevent over 80,000 new cervical cancer cases diagnosed every year.

KEY MESSAGES

1

CANCER IS A LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH IN THE AMERICAS.

IN 2008, CANCER ACCOUNTED FOR 1.2 MILLION DEATHS. ABOUT 45% OF THE CANCER DEATHS OCCURRED IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN.

- The majority of cancer deaths are caused by lung, prostate and colorectal cancers in men, and lung, breast and colorectal cancers in women.
- The most frequent types of cancer differ by subregions. For example:
 - » in women in North America lung cancer is the primary cause of cancer deaths, while cervical cancer is the top cause among women in Central America;
 - » in men in the English Caribbean, prostate cancer incidence and mortality rates are significantly higher compared with other subregions;
 - » in both sexes in Latin American and the Caribbean, stomach cancer ranks as the fifth cause of death, while in Northern America it is not even among the 15 top causes of cancer deaths.

2

THE NUMBER OF NEW CANCER CASES IS ON THE RISE IN THE REGION.

THIS IS MAINLY DUE TO THE GROWING POPULATION, PEOPLE LIVING LONGER, AND CHANGING LIFESTYLES. LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES WILL FACE THE HIGHEST INCREASE IN CANCER UNLESS EXPOSURE TO RISK FACTORS IS REDUCED. ALSO, MORE PEOPLE ARE EXPECTED TO BE DIAGNOSED WITH CANCER IN THE PRIME OF THEIR LIVES.

- Deaths from cancer in the Region of the Americas are projected to reach over 2 million in 2030.
- Between 2008 and 2030, the number of new cancer cases is expected to increase more than 85% in Latin America and the Caribbean, which is almost double the rate expected in North America (55%).
- It is projected that by 2030 around 1.6 million people will be diagnosed with cancer each year in Latin America and the Caribbean.



3

ABOUT A THIRD OF ALL CANCER CASES COULD BE PREVENTED BY AVOIDING KEY RISK FACTORS.

THESE INCLUDE TOBACCO USE, HARMFUL USE OF ALCOHOL, UNHEALTHY DIET AND PHYSICAL INACTIVITY.

- Lung cancer was responsible for almost 250,000 deaths in the Americas in 2008. It kills more people in the Region than any other cancer - a trend that is expected to continue until 2030, when over 450,000 deaths from this disease are expected, unless tobacco control efforts are greatly intensified.

4

VACCINATION AND SCREENING PROGRAMS ARE EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS TO REDUCE THE BURDEN OF SPECIFIC TYPES OF CANCER.

PAHO/WHO PROMOTES THE INCLUSION OF PROVEN STRATEGIES INTO NATIONAL CANCER CONTROL PROGRAMS.

- There are safe and effective vaccines against the human papilloma virus (HPV), which causes cervical cancer and against the hepatitis B virus (HBV), which causes liver cancer.
- Cervical cancer caused over 30,000 deaths in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2008, representing the second most common cancer in women in this subregion. Cost-effective and accessible screening programs to detect cervical cancer or pre-cancer combined with prompt treatment can reduce deaths in women.
- Liver cancer killed almost 50 000 people in 2008 in the Americas. Most cases of liver cancer (78%) are caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV) and the hepatitis C virus (HCV). The HBV vaccine can prevent most new HBV infections.

5

MANY CANCERS HAVE A HIGH CHANCE OF CURE IF DETECTED EARLY AND TREATED PROPERLY.

- Some of the most common cancer types, such as breast cancer, cervical cancer, oral cancer and colorectal cancer, are largely curable if they are detected early and treated appropriately.

KEY ACTIONS BY PAHO

PAHO IS COLLABORATING WITH MEMBER STATES IN THE AMERICAS AND WITH PARTNERS TO INCREASE CAPACITY FOR COMPREHENSIVE CANCER CONTROL PROGRAMS, INCLUDING:

- promoting policies for tobacco control, alcohol, healthy eating and physical activity;
- increasing immunization against infections that cause certain types of cancer, such as cervical cancer and liver cancer, and improving protection from carcinogens at the work place and in the environment;
- increasing access to screening programs for early detection, for example, of cervical cancer and breast cancer;
- increasing cancer patients' access to timely diagnosis and appropriate treatment;
- increasing access to palliative care for patients.

To find out more about cancer in the Americas and PAHO's work, visit:



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