



Canadian  
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## Canadian cancer death rate down

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TORONTO -

The cancer death rate in Canada is going down, resulting in nearly 100,000 lives saved over the last 20 years (1988 to 2007). Despite the drop in the death rate, cancer is still the leading cause of death in Canada. Canadian Cancer Statistics 2012 was released today by the Canadian Cancer Society, in collaboration with the Public Health Agency of Canada and Statistics Canada.

Declines in death rates were seen in all four major cancers: lung, colorectal, breast and prostate. Between 1988 and 2007, overall death rates dropped by 21% in men and 9% in women.

A smaller decline in the women's death rate is due to the increase in lung cancer deaths among women over the same timeframe. This increase is thought to be due primarily to the fact that women's smoking rates did not begin to decline until the 1980s, whereas in men, smoking rates began to decline in the 1960s. It takes time before decreases in population-wide smoking prevalence translate into drops in lung cancer incidence and death rates.

Tobacco use, along with unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, excess body weight, alcohol consumption, over-exposure to the sun and exposure to environmental and workplace carcinogens account for a substantial number of cancer diagnoses and deaths each year.

"A large body of evidence has accumulated over the last 30 years showing that about half of cancers can be prevented," says Gillian Bromfield, Director, Cancer Control Policy, Canadian Cancer Society. "Even greater gains can be made in reducing cancer rates if more is done to help Canadians embrace healthy lifestyles and if governments do more to create policies that encourage people to make these changes. The Society remains committed to informing Canadians about how they can reduce their cancer risk and advocating for governments to pass policies to make healthy choices easy choices."

### **Tobacco control and lung cancer**

The decline in smoking rates among men is a significant reason for the overall drop in the death rate for men. The lung cancer death rate for men dropped by 30% between 1988 and



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2007. Among Canadian males aged 15 and up, smoking has declined from a high of 61% in 1965 to 20% in 2010.

Among women, however, the lung cancer death rate has not dropped yet, although it has now stabilized. This is because smoking among women peaked later than among men and saw substantial declines beginning only in the 1980s.

In 1965, 38% of Canadian women smoked, compared to 14% of Canadian women who smoked in 2010.

Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death among women. More Canadians die of lung cancer every year than the combined deaths from breast, colorectal and prostate cancer.

Overall, current smoking rates among Canadians (males and females combined) is 17% (2010), compared to 25% in 1999 and 50% in 1965. Smoking accounts for about 30% of all cancer deaths. It is linked with an increased risk for at least 18 types of cancer, including lung, larynx, oral, stomach, pancreas and kidney.

“While we have made significant progress in reducing smoking, an enormous amount of work remains to be done,” says Rob Cunningham, Senior Policy Analyst for the Canadian Cancer Society. “It is essential that government regulatory and programming initiatives be strengthened so that smoking rates can be driven down as fast as possible.”

For example, tobacco control measures should include:

- sustained, well-funded government prevention and cessation programs
- plain packaging, while keeping picture health warnings on packages
- smoke-free requirements for selected outdoor areas such as patios, parks and playgrounds
- bans on flavoured tobacco products not covered by Bill C-32
- a reduction in the number of retail locations selling tobacco
- further tobacco tax increases along with contraband prevention measures

### **Improvements in cancer screening and treatments**

The declining death rates also suggest that improvements in screening and early detection are having a positive effect, such as:



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- the fecal occult blood test for colorectal cancer
- the Pap test for cervical cancer
- screening mammography for breast cancer

In addition, the discovery and use of more effective and less toxic cancer treatments are saving more lives.

### **Rise in rare cancers**

Another trend seen in this year's Canadian Cancer Statistics is the rise in the incidence of certain rare cancers, such as liver, thyroid and kidney, although there are potential explanations for the rise in incidence for these particular cancers. Rising incidence of kidney and liver cancers may be attributed to a number of factors, including:

- obesity
- for liver cancer, growing immigration from countries where hepatitis B and C virus infections are more common, as well as alcohol abuse

The incidence rate of thyroid cancer, the most rapidly increasing cancer, may be the result of more frequent use of diagnostic testing that may be detecting earlier stage, asymptomatic thyroid cancers more frequently than was possible in the past.

### **General highlights: Canadian Cancer Statistics 2012**

- An estimated 186,400 new cases of cancer (excluding 81,300 cases of non-melanoma skin cancer) and 75,700 deaths from cancer are expected to occur in Canada in 2012.
- More men than women are diagnosed with cancer, but the gap between the two sexes has narrowed in recent years (52% of cases are in men versus 48% in women).
- More than one quarter of all cancer deaths (27%) are due to lung cancer.
- Four major cancers (lung, breast, colorectal and prostate) account for the majority (53%) of newly diagnosed cancers in both men and women.
- The death rate for all cancers combined is declining for males in most age groups and for females under 70.



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- The number of new cancer cases continues to rise steadily as the Canadian population grows and ages.

*Canadian Cancer Statistics 2012 was prepared and distributed through a collaboration of the Canadian Cancer Society, the Public Health Agency of Canada, Statistics Canada, provincial/territorial cancer registries, as well as university-based and provincial/territorial cancer agency-based cancer researchers.*

### **About the Canadian Cancer Society**

The Canadian Cancer Society (CCS) is the only national charity that supports Canadians with all cancers in communities across the country. No other organization does what we do; we are the voice for Canadians who care about cancer. We fund groundbreaking research, provide a support system for all those affected by cancer and advocate to governments for important social change.

Help us make a difference. Call 1-888-939-3333 or visit [cancer.ca](http://cancer.ca) today.