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Media backgrounder: Colorectal cancer in Canada

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TORONTO -

Canadian Cancer Statistics: A 2018 special report on cancer incidence by stage was released today by the Canadian Cancer Society in partnership with the Public Health Agency of Canada and Statistics Canada in collaboration with the provincial and territorial cancer registries. The report revealed that almost 50% of colorectal cancers in Canada are diagnosed after they have spread despite availability in most provinces and territories of colorectal cancer screening programs.

Overview

More about colorectal cancer

Colorectal cancer is the second most commonly diagnosed cancer in Canada and the second leading cause of cancer death.

Incidence and mortality:

- In 2017, an estimated 26,800 Canadians were diagnosed with colorectal cancer (13% of all new cancer cases) and 9,400 Canadians died from colorectal cancer (12% of all cancer deaths)
 - On average, 73 Canadians were diagnosed with colorectal cancer every day
 - On average, 26 Canadians died from colorectal cancer every day
- It is estimated that about 1 in 13 men and 1 in 16 women will be diagnosed with colorectal cancer during their lifetime
- The 5-year survival rate for colorectal cancer is about 64%
 - The 5-year survival rate when diagnosed at stage 4 is less than 15%
 - The 5-year survival rate when diagnosed at stage 1 is closer to 90%
- Rates of colorectal cancer cases and cancer deaths are decreasing



Colorectal cancer screening tests

CCS recommends that Canadians aged 50 to 74 who are not at high risk for colorectal cancer get screened every 2 years with a simple at-home stool test. There are 2 types of stool tests used in Canada to screen for colorectal cancer:

- The guaiac-based fecal occult blood test (FOBT) uses a chemical reaction on a paper card to find traces of blood in the stool.
- The fecal immunochemical test (FIT) uses specific antibodies to find traces of blood in the stool.

The FOBT and FIT tests can detect blood in stool which may be a sign of cancer. People who receive a positive result need to have follow-up tests.

Colorectal cancer screening programs

Nine provinces and Yukon currently have organized colorectal cancer screening programs that use at-home stool tests, and plans are underway to develop programs in Nunavut and Quebec. Northwest Territories does not have an organized screening program but screening using a stool test is available through hospitals and clinics.

Screening guidelines can differ by province and territory. Canadians should contact their cancer agency for more details on screening in their province or territory.

Participation in colorectal cancer screening programs

Participation rates for colorectal cancer screening vary among provinces and territories. Of the population-based cancer screening programs available in Canada, participation rates in colorectal cancer screening programs are the lowest. Based on the most recent data available, no programs are reaching the target of at least 60% participation.

Stage at diagnosis for colorectal cancers

The 2018 special report includes new, comprehensive data on cancer incidence by stage in Canada. The percent distribution of colorectal cancer cases by stage at diagnosis in Canada between 2011 and 2015 is as follows:

- Stage unknown: 3.8%
- Stage 1: 23.5%



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- Stage 2: 23.6%
- Stage 3: 29.1%
- Stage 4: 19.9%

More about cancer staging

Staging is a way to classify a cancer based on how much disease is in the body and the spread of the disease at the time of diagnosis. Cancers are usually assigned a stage from 1 to 4. Generally, the higher the number, the more the cancer has spread.

- Stage 1: Tumor is small and has not grown outside the organ it started in.
- Stage 2: Tumor is larger than stage 1 but has not spread to nearby tissue.
- Stage 3: Tumor is large and has spread to nearby tissue and lymph nodes.
- Stage 4: Tumor has spread through the blood or lymphatic system to a distant site in the body.

About Canadian Cancer Statistics

Canadian Cancer Statistics is prepared through a partnership of the Canadian Cancer Society, the Public Health Agency of Canada and Statistics Canada in collaboration with the provincial and territorial cancer registries. For more than 30 years, this publication has been providing information that helps decide what support and services are needed and what research should be done. It also helps assess the impact of prevention, early detection and treatment.

About the Canadian Cancer Society

The Canadian Cancer Society is a national, community-based organization of volunteers whose mission is to eradicate cancer and enhance the quality of life of people living with cancer. Thanks to our donors and volunteers, CCS has the most impact, against the most cancers, in the most communities in Canada. Building on our progress, we are working with Canadians to change cancer forever. To learn more about cancer, visit cancer.ca or call our toll-free, bilingual Cancer Information Service at 1-888-939-3333 (TTY 1-866-786-3934).