

American Cancer Society Report Finds Signs that Cancer Progress Could Stall

Atlanta 2007/04/10 -An annual report from the American Cancer Society finds that despite recent declines in cancer death rates, there are worrisome signs that progress could stall. Most importantly, declines in adult and youth tobacco use have leveled off, and mammography is still not reaching a substantial part of the population. The report, Cancer Prevention & Early Detection Facts and Figures 2007 (CPED) indicates that if the key interventions responsible for declining death rates are not sustained and made available to all segments of the population, recent important gains in the cancer fight could slow or stall.

“The historic second consecutive drop in U.S. total cancer deaths reported this year is a remarkable sign that we have the potential to turn back deaths from cancer,” said John R. Seffrin, PhD, national chief executive officer of the American Cancer Society. “Much of the suffering and death from cancer could be prevented by more systematic efforts to reduce tobacco use, improve diet, increase activity levels, and expand the use of established screening tests. But this report shows we may be losing momentum in some key areas that have been critical to our success.”

CPED provides the most current information about progress in cancer prevention and early detection within each state and the nation. This year’s report comes during a time of notable successes: the death rate from all cancers combined has decreased in each of the last 12 years for which data is available (overall decrease of 13.6 percent from 1991 to 2004); the number of actual cancer deaths in the United States dropped by more than 3000 between 2003 to 2004, the second year in which this number decreased despite continued growth and aging of the population; a new vaccine has become available to prevent infection with the virus that causes cervical cancer; and successful grassroots efforts to pass smoke-free laws succeeded in implementation of legislation in three new states in the 2006 elections (Ohio, Arizona, Nevada) despite lavishly funded opposition from the tobacco companies.

“Despite this progress, we are missing huge opportunities to prevent cancer entirely or to detect it at a very early stage when it is most treatable,” said Michael Thun, MD, vice president of epidemiology and surveillance research. According to the report:

- Only 54.9 percent of women report having a mammogram in the past year; 69.7 percent in the past two years. The percentage of women who report having a mammogram in the past two years did not increase from 2000 to 2003.
- Only 40.2 percent of women without health insurance report having a mammogram in the past two years. The federal program that provides screening for breast and cervical cancer to low income women had sufficient funding to provide mammography to only 13 percent of eligible women in 2002 to 2003.
- Industry expenditures to promote smoking in 2003 exceeded total funding for tobacco control by a ratio of nearly 23 to 1.
- Progress in reducing smoking among adults and high school students has stalled in the last few years, likely reflecting increased tobacco industry expenditures on marketing and promotion and declines in funding for comprehensive tobacco control programs.
- In the past 20 years, the prevalence of obesity has tripled in adolescents aged 13 to 19, from five percent to 17.1 percent.
- Obesity rates in adults doubled between 1976 (15 percent) and 2004 (33.3 percent).
- Just over one-third (35.8 percent) of U.S. youth are physically active for at least 60 minutes on more than 5 days per week; one-third (33 percent) attend physical education classes daily.

- Nearly four in ten U.S. high school students (37.2 percent) report watching three or more hours of television per day.
- Only about one in five U.S. high school students (20.1 percent) and one in four adults (24.3 percent) eats fruits and vegetables five or more times per day.
- Although appropriate use of screening could cut colorectal cancer deaths in half, fewer than half of Americans 50 and older have had a recent colorectal screening test.
- UV exposure is associated with more than one million cases of basal and squamous cell cancers and 59,940 cases of malignant melanoma (one of the fastest rising cancers in the U.S.) in 2007.
- More than two-thirds (68.7 percent) of youth reported getting sunburned during the summer months.
- Forty one percent of white adults reported getting sunburned in the past year.

The report estimates that in 2007 approximately 168,000 cancer deaths will be caused by tobacco; that approximately one-third (186,550) of the 559,650 cancer deaths expected to occur in 2007 are attributable to poor nutrition, overweight and obesity, and physical inactivity; and that many deaths from cancers of the breast, colon, rectum, and cervix could be prevented by greater use of screening tests. To date, 19 states and the District of Columbia have taken the lead in passing legislation to ensure coverage for the full range of colorectal cancer screening tests. "This report points to how much more we could do if we utilized the lifesaving tools at our disposal," said Dr. Seffrin. "We've laid out the case with detailed, up-to-date data to give those fighting this disease a roadmap to success."

About the American Cancer Society

The American Cancer Society is dedicated to eliminating cancer as a major health problem by saving lives, diminishing suffering and preventing cancer through research, education, advocacy and service. Founded in 1913 and with national headquarters in Atlanta, the Society has 13 regional Divisions and local offices in 3,400 communities, involving millions of volunteers across the United States. For more information anytime, call toll free 1-800-ACS-2345 or visit www.cancer.org.

The full report can be viewed by visiting the American Cancer Society Web site at www.cancer.org/statistics.

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