Report Finds Historic Drop in Total Number of Cancer Deaths

American Cancer Society Estimates Based on First Drop in Deaths in More Than Seven Decades

The American Cancer Society's annual estimate of cancer deaths says 2006 will see a slight decline in the projected number of cancer deaths compared to estimates made for 2005. The projections are based on a decline in the actual number of cancer deaths reported by the National Center for Health Statistics for 2002 (557,271 deaths) and 2003 (556,902 deaths), the first decline in the actual number of cancer deaths in over 70 years.

From 2002 to 2003, the number of recorded cancer deaths decreased by 778 in men, but increased by 409 in women, resulting in a net decrease of 369 total cancer deaths, the first such decrease since 1930, when nationwide data began to be compiled. The decrease in the number of Americans dying from cancer is a result of declining cancer death rates outpacing the impact of growth and aging of the population. Death rates adjust for the size and age of the population. The death rate from all cancers combined has decreased in the United States since 1991, but not until 2003 was the decrease large enough to outpace the growth and aging of the population and reduce the actual number of cancer deaths. While it is unclear whether the decline in the total number of cancer deaths will continue, it marks a notable milestone in the battle against cancer. The estimates are included in the 55th edition of Cancer Facts & Figures, which projects that in 2006, approximately 1.4 million Americans will be diagnosed with cancer and 565,000 will die of the disease.

"The drop in the actual number of cancer deaths in 2003 and in our own projections for 2006 mark a remarkable turn in our decades-long fight to eliminate cancer as a major health threat," said John R. Seffrin, PhD, American Cancer Society chief executive officer. "For years, we've proudly pointed to dropping cancer death rates even as a growing and aging population meant more actual deaths. Now, for the first time, the advances we've made in prevention, early detection, and treatment are outpacing even the population factors that in some ways obscured that success."

Since 1952, when the first edition of the publication consisted of four typewritten pages, Cancer Facts & Figures has become a critical tool for scientists and journalists reporting on cancer trends. The annual estimates of new cancer cases and deaths are some of the most widely quoted cancer statistics in the world. The Society's leading team of epidemiologic researchers compiles and analyzes incidence and mortality data from around the country to estimate the number of new cancer cases and deaths for the current year nationwide and in individual states. Other highlights from this year's publication:

- In 2006, an estimated 1,399,790 new cancer cases and 564,830 deaths from cancer are expected in the United States.

- Incidence and death rates from lung cancer continue to decrease in men. Among women the lung cancer incidence rate has leveled off but death rates continue to increase. Lung cancer remains the top cause of cancer death in the U.S., with an estimated 174,470 new cases and 162,460 deaths expected this year.

- Kentucky has the highest lung cancer death rate in the U.S. Expected lung cancer deaths in Kentucky in 2006 (3,500) rival that of Massachusetts (3,790), a state with more than 50 percent more residents.

- Breast cancer remains the most common cancer other than skin cancer among women in the U.S., with an estimated 212,920 new cases and 40,970 deaths expected in 2006. Despite increasing incidence, the death rate from breast cancer continues to fall.

- Prostate cancer is the most common cancer other than skin cancer among men in the U.S., with an estimated 234,460 new cases and 27,350 deaths expected in 2006. Although death rates have decreased since the early 1990s, rates in African American men remain more than twice as high as rates in white men.

Cancers that can be prevented or detected earlier by following the Society's testing guidelines account for approximately half of all new cancer cases in the United States. Scientific evidence suggests that about half of the cancer deaths expected in the United States will be related to tobacco use, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, and being overweight or obese. The Great American Health Check(SM) is an easy, confidential, online health assessment tool available year-round at www.cancer.org/healthcheck to raise national awareness of early cancer detection tests and the benefits of following a healthy lifestyle. The tool was developed by the American Cancer Society and is made possible by Metropolitan Life Insurance Company ("MetLife"), with additional support from official sponsors Quest Diagnostics and Bayer Aspirin(R).

Great American Health Check users can go online and answer questions about age, gender, height, weight, family history of cancer, dietary habits, physical activity levels, alcohol and tobacco use, either for themselves or a loved one. They then receive a personalized cancer action plan that includes early cancer detection tests they may need as well as recommendations for healthy lifestyle changes. Cancer information specialists are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week at the American Cancer Society's toll-free call center, 1-800-ACS-2345, to mail information on the Great American Health Check and specific cancer screenings.

Each year, Cancer Facts & Figures features a Special Section highlighting a particular aspect of cancer prevention, early detection or treatment. Tobacco, obesity, and infectious causes of cancer have been discussed in recent years. In 2006, the Special Section considers environmental pollutants (particularly air pollutants) and cancer. While exposure to pollutants is thought to account for a relatively small percentage of cancer deaths -- about four percent from occupational exposures and two percent from environmental pollutants (man-made and naturally occurring) -- the topic is of considerable public interest and an ongoing scientific challenge. Even a small percentage (six percent) can represent many deaths, approximately 33,900 in the U.S.

Much of what is known about air contaminants and cancer comes from occupational studies of workers who were highly exposed in the past and can be clearly identified and followed for long periods of time. The Special Section provides information about two air pollutants that pose potential risk to the general public: asbestos and radon. Asbestos causes lung cancer, mesothelioma, and possibly other cancers, while radon causes lung cancer. Asbestos products remain in most buildings constructed between 1930 and 1975, and can present a danger during renovations or demolition. Radon, a gas that is emitted naturally from the earth, has been shown to cause lung cancer in miners exposed to very high concentrations and is present at lower concentrations in the indoor air (generally basements) of most homes. Radon has been estimated to cause between ten and 14 percent of lung cancer deaths in the U.S. The Special Section describes recommendations made by public health agencies to minimize exposures to asbestos and radon.

Secondhand tobacco smoke is an important indoor air contaminant known to increase cancer risk. Cigarette smoke contains many known and probable carcinogens. For example, it is a major source of population exposure to benzene, a leukemia-causing substance also present in gasoline fumes and automobile exhaust.

The article also describes the major sources and types of outdoor air pollution. Sources include vehicles, factories, fossil fuel-burning power plants, incinerators, recycling facilities, and metal smelting plants, as well as natural sources, like windblown dust and wildfires. The report details the major categories of air pollutants and how they are regulated. Exposure to fine particulates, a type of air pollution often present in urban air, has been linked with lung cancer, and there is even stronger evidence of increased heart and lung disease associated with exposure. The report recognizes progress in reducing air pollution and the importance that such progress be sustained. The full report can be viewed after embargo at www.cancer.org/statistics.

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.

*U.S. Census Bureau estimated July 2005 populations: Kentucky 4,173,405; Massachusetts 6,398,743

SOURCE: American Cancer Society

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