Iowa Cancer Rates Continue to Rise, Largely Driven by Prostate and Breast Cancer Diagnoses

A new study by the American Cancer Society highlights the need to strengthen preventive measures to reduce cancer rates

Key Takeaways:

- Iowa's overall cancer rate increased among men and women while remaining stable in surrounding states.
- Rise in cancer incidence driven largely by early-stage prostate and breast cancers.
- Increased detection, clinical evaluation, or imaging or tests done for other reasons linked to a higher number of cancer diagnoses.
- Lung cancer rates declined among men and women in surrounding states, but in Iowa, the rate declined at a slower pace among men and did not decline among women.

ATLANTA, November 9, 2026 — Iowa has the second-highest rate of new cancer diagnoses in the United States and is one of only three states with rising incidence rates. A new study by researchers at the American Cancer Society (ACS) shows the cancer burden continues to rise. The results find Iowa's overall cancer incidence rate increased 0.6% annually among men from 2013-2022 and among women from 2005-2022, while remaining stable in surrounding states. The increases were driven primarily by prostate and breast cancers detected at earlier stages when tumors have not spread. The findings are to be published today in *Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention (CEBP),* a journal of the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR).

"Together with declining cancer death rates, our findings are most consistent with increased detection, particularly for cancers commonly found through cancer screening, clinical evaluation, or imaging or tests done for other reasons," said Dr. Qinran Liu, postdoctoral fellow, cancer disparity research at the American Cancer Society and lead author of the study. "The results highlight the continued need to strengthen preventive measures and to help people get timely cancer screening and follow-up care."

For the study, researchers examined trends in cancer diagnosis and death rates over 22 years (2001 to 2022), alongside longer-term trends in cancer screening and major risk factors. They compared these trends with those in the seven surrounding states (Illinois, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Wisconsin) combined to identify drivers of Iowa's increasing cancer incidence. They obtained data from the National Program of Cancer Registries (NPCR), the Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results (SEER) incidence database, and the National Center for Health Statistics.

The results showed cancer rates in Iowa and surrounding states were generally comparable during 2001-2013. Between 2013 and 2022, however, Iowa saw a noticeable rise in cancer diagnoses compared to its neighboring states, even though actual cancer death rates went down. By 2022, Iowa's cancer incidence rates were 11% higher for men and 6% higher for women than in surrounding states. The top cancers driving the increase for men were prostate, melanoma (skin), and kidney cancers. For women, the largest increases were in breast, melanoma, and uterine cancers. Most of these cancers were caught early or at a localized stage. However, there was also a small, concerning rise in late-stage breast and prostate cancers. Lung cancer incidence rates declined in men and women in surrounding states, but in Iowa, the rate declined at a slower pace in men and did not decline among women.

Prostate cancer was responsible for nearly half (43.5%) of the difference in cancer rates between Iowa men and men in other states from 2013 and 2022. For women, breast and lung cancers made up over half (57.8%) of the difference. Cancer mortality rates dropped in both Iowa and the surrounding states. While cancer screening rates and general health habits were mostly the same across the region, researchers noted one exception: binge drinking among men worsened in Iowa compared to neighboring states.

"More research using information about insurance coverage, medical care, screening and diagnostic tests, and lifestyle factors is needed to better understand these trends," Liu added. "Environmental factors also need to be

studied more closely, as agricultural exposures and widespread radon are also major concerns in Iowa. We could not examine these factors due to the lack of individual-level data."

"This study underscores that access to comprehensive, affordable health insurance and care, including cancer prevention and screening services, saves lives," said Lisa Lacasse, president of the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network. "Research shows that having health insurance is one of the most significant factors in surviving a cancer diagnosis. To help bring these numbers down in Iowa and reduce suffering and death from cancer nationwide, we urge lawmakers in all state capitols and in Washington, D.C., to protect access to comprehensive insurance coverage and prioritize investments in research to better understand the causes of elevated cancer incidence rates where they occur."

Other ACS researchers contributing to this study include Dr. Daniel Wiese, Jessica Star, MA, MPH, Dr. Jordan Baeker Bispo, Dr. Ahmedin Jemal, and senior author Dr. Farhad Islami.

Additional ACS Resources:

- Cancer Statistics Center
- CancerRisk360
- Understanding the Causes of Cancer
- Annual Cancer Statistics Report 2026

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About the American Cancer Society
The American Cancer Society is a leading cancer-fighting organization with a vision to end cancer as we know it, for everyone. For more than 110 years, we have been improving the lives of people with cancer and their families as the only organization combating cancer through advocacy, research, and patient support. We are committed to ensuring everyone has an opportunity to prevent, detect, treat, and survive cancer. To learn more, visit cancer.org or call our 24/7 helpline at 1-800-227-2345. Connect with us on Facebook, X, and Instagram.

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