

American Cancer Society Report Finds Breast Cancer Death Rate Continues to Drop

Atlanta 2009/09/30 -A new report from the American Cancer Society finds the breast cancer death rate in the United States continues to drop more than 2 percent per year, a trend that began in 1990, and that over the last ten years the rate of decline among African American and Hispanic women is similar to the drop among white women. However, death rates for breast cancer remain 40 percent higher in African American than white women.

The findings are published in Breast Cancer Facts & Figures 2009-2010 (available online September 30 at <http://www.cancer.org/statistics>). The report, published every two years since 1996, provides detailed analyses of breast cancer trends and presents information on known risk factors for the disease, factors that influence survival, the latest data on prevention, early detection, treatment, and ongoing and future research.

“Breast cancer remains a major fear for women living in the U.S. and a major cause of cancer death, but it’s important to note that a woman’s chances of dying from breast cancer have now been dropping for more than a decade,” said Otis W. Brawley, M.D., chief medical officer of the American Cancer Society. “We’ve now identified major risk factors for breast cancer, many of which are modifiable. For instance, we’ve seen a drop in incidence associated with less use of postmenopausal hormones. And while that is gratifying to see, we remain concerned about obesity’s potential to offset that drop, and lead to an increase in the incidence of breast cancer in the future.”

Other highlights of Breast Cancer Facts & Figures 2009-2010 include:

- In 2009, an estimated 192,370 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer. Excluding cancers of the skin, breast cancer is the most common cancer among women in the United States, accounting for more than 1 in 4 cancers diagnosed.
- An estimated 40,170 women are expected to die from the disease in 2009. Only lung cancer accounts for more cancer deaths in women.
- In January 2006 (the latest year for which figures are available), approximately 2.5 million women living in the U.S. had a history of breast cancer. Most of them were cancer-free, while others still had evidence of cancer and may have been undergoing treatment.
- Between 2002 and 2003, a sharp decline in breast cancer incidence rates occurred in the U. S., particularly among women aged 50 to 69. This decrease is likely a result of the rapid drop in menopausal hormone use that began in 2002. Breast cancer incidence rates have remained relatively stable since 2003.
- While incidence rates have declined for white women, breast cancer incidence rates have remained relatively stable for African American women. The lack of a decline in African Americans may be due to the lack of a significant decrease in mammography screening rates and/or historically lower rates of menopausal hormone use.
- Although overall breast cancer incidence rates are lower in African American than white women, African American women have higher incidence rates of distant stage disease; are more likely to be diagnosed with larger tumors; and are more likely to die from the disease.
- Breast cancer mortality rates have declined steadily since 1990. The drop in mortality has been larger among women under 50 (3.2% per year) than among women over 50 (2.0% per year).
- From 1997-2006, female breast cancer death rates declined by 1.9% per year in non-Hispanic whites and Hispanics/Latinas, 1.6% per year in African Americans, and 0.6% per year among Asian

Americans/Pacific Islanders. Death rates have remained unchanged among and American Indians/Alaska Natives.

- There is clear evidence that mammography reduces the risk of dying from breast cancer. After increasing for many years, the percentage of women aged 40 years and older who report having had a mammogram has dropped. According to survey data, 51.2 % of women 40 or older have had a mammogram within the past year.

- Modifiable factors associated with an increased risk of breast cancer include postmenopausal obesity, menopausal hormone use, physical inactivity, and alcohol consumption of two or more drinks per day.

“The steady drop in the breast cancer death rate means that this year alone, about 15,000 breast cancer deaths were avoided that would have occurred had rates not begun to drop,” said John R. Seffrin, Ph.D., chief executive officer of the American Cancer Society. “Since the early 1990s, that decline adds up to more than 130,000 grandmothers, mothers, and daughters who were alive, perhaps to celebrate another birthday, and even to go on to live a full, rich life.”

“While there is much to celebrate in the fight against cancer, this report is also a strong reminder that far too many women still die of breast cancer and of the work yet to be done,” said Elizabeth “Terry” T.H. Fontham, M.P.H., Dr.P.H., American Cancer Society national volunteer president. “We need to make sure all women have access to information to help them reduce their risk and to resources to ensure early detection and the best possible treatment.”

About the American Cancer Society

The American Cancer Society combines an unyielding passion with nearly a century of experience to save lives and end suffering from cancer. As a global grassroots force of more than three million volunteers, we fight for every birthday threatened by every cancer in every community. We save lives by helping people stay well by preventing cancer or detecting it early; helping people get well by being there for them during and after a cancer diagnosis; by finding cures through investment in groundbreaking discovery; and by fighting back by rallying lawmakers to pass laws to defeat cancer and by rallying communities worldwide to join the fight. As the nation’s largest non-governmental investor in cancer research, contributing about \$3.4 billion, we turn what we know about cancer into what we do. As a result, more than 11 million people in America who have had cancer and countless more who have avoided it will be celebrating birthdays this year. To learn more about us or to get help, call us any time, day or night, at 1-800-227-2345 or visit cancer.org.

David Sampson
Director, Medical & Scientific Communications
American Cancer Society
213 368-8523
david.sampson@cancer.org
