



Alabama Vital Stats

Cancer Deaths in Alabama and the US - 2003

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in both the United States and Alabama. Cancer occurs when cells in a part of the body begin to grow uncontrollably, outliving normal cells and forming new abnormal cells. In Alabama, the most common types of cancer include lung; colon, rectum, and anus (colorectal); breast; and prostate (Figure 1). According to CDC, nationally, more than 1,500 people a day are expected to die from cancer. In 2003, 9,790 Alabama residents died from cancer for a crude rate of 217.5 per 100,000 population. One in every five deaths was attributed to this deadly disease.

The Alabama age-adjusted cancer death rate pattern closely follows the national rate for both blacks and whites. Black death rates exceed white rates both nationally and in Alabama (Figure 2). While there have been slight variations in the black rates over the past 25 years, the 2003 age-adjusted rate is the same as the 1979 rate. Alabama's white age-adjusted cancer death rate rose to surpass the national rate in 1994. In 2002, the white cancer death rate exceeded the national rate by 4.3 percent.

Figure 1. Leading Causes of Cancer Deaths, Alabama, 2003

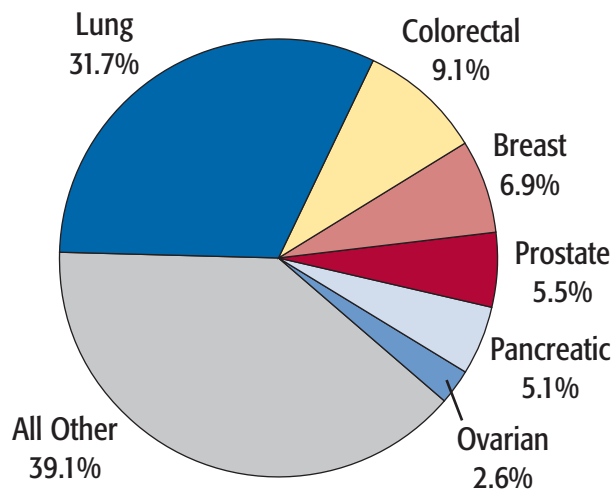


Figure 2. Cancer Age-Adjusted Death Rates by Race, Alabama and United States, 1979 to 2003

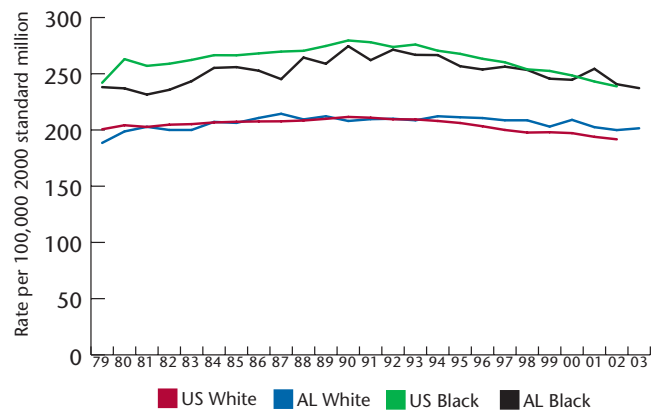


Table 1. Leading Causes of Cancer Deaths and Crude Death Rates by Sex, Alabama, 2003

Males			Females		
	Number	Rate		Number	Rate
Trachea, Bronchus, and Lung	1,944	89.2	Trachea, Bronchus, Lung	1,156	49.8
Prostate	541	24.8	Breast	679	29.2
Colorectal	448	20.6	Colorectal	442	19.0
Pancreas	240	11.0	Pancreas	256	11.0
Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma	174	8.0	Ovary	253	10.9
Leukemia	166	7.6	Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma	179	7.7
Esophagus	153	7.0	Leukemia	165	7.1
Liver and Intrahepatic Bile Ducts	150	6.9	Corpus Uteri and Uterus, Part Unspecified	102	7.1

Compared to women, men have a higher total cancer mortality rate (244.3 vs 192.4). This is explained in part by certain higher cancer rates, particularly lung (89.2 vs 49.8) and esophagus (7.0 vs 1.8) (Table 1).

In 2003, the age-adjusted death rate for Alabama men was 68 percent higher than the rate for women. The age-adjusted rate per 100,000 population for black and other males was the highest at 318.9, followed by white males at a rate of 260.3. Correspondingly, death rates for females were 169.5 for black and other females and 160.5 for white females.

According to the American Cancer Society, 77 percent of all cancers occur in people who are 55 and older. As shown in Figure 3, for the age group 45-54, the death rate for males and females of all races is relatively the same. However, beginning with the age group 55-64, the death rate for males increases at a faster rate than for females. By age 85, remarkable differences are seen between men and women and between black men and white men.

Figure 3. Cancer Age-Specific Death Rates by Race, Sex, and Age Group Alabama, 2003

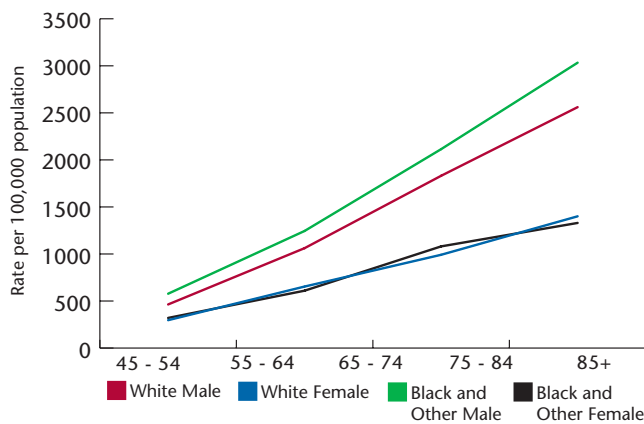
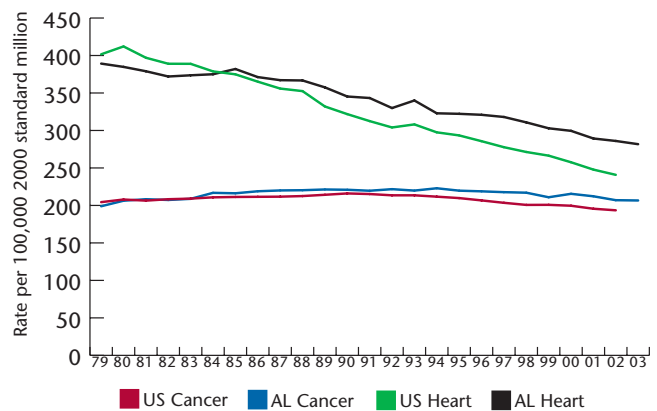


Figure 4. Cancer and Heart Disease Age-Adjusted Death Rates, Alabama and the United States, 1979 to 2003



A recent article in the CA Cancer Journal for Clinicians (Vol. 55, No. 1:20,22) highlighted that nationally, using age-adjusted figures for men and women under age 85, cancer has overtaken heart disease as the leading cause of death. In Alabama, for men and women in the age groups 45-54, cancer has been the leading cause of death since 1982. Additionally, since 1995, cancer has overtaken heart disease as the primary cause of death for the age groups 55-64, and 65-74.

While the age-adjusted heart disease rate decreased by 40.3 percent nationally, and by 27.6 percent in Alabama since 1979, the age-adjusted cancer death rate only decreased by 5.3 percent nationally and actually increased by 3.9 percent in Alabama (Figure 4). With a growing number of people dying from cancer and virtually no improvement in the age-adjusted rates for the past 25 years, more must be done to prevent, detect, diagnose and treat this disease.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, you should ask your doctor about the following cancer screening tests:

MEN:

- Colonoscopy
- Digital rectal exam (DRE)
- Prostate specific antigen (PSA) test
- Testicular self exam

WOMEN:

- Breast self exam
- Colonoscopy
- Mammogram
- Pap Test
- Pelvic exam