

Script – Print – Cancer death rates dropping across the country American Cancer Society report shows a 33% decline since 1991

A new report from the American Cancer Society (ACS) says that the rate of people dying from cancer in the United States has declined significantly over the past three decades.

According to the [report](#), the U.S. cancer death rate has dropped 33% since 1991, which equates to about 3.8 million fewer deaths. The report also found that the five-year survival rate for all cancers combined has increased from 49% for those diagnosed in the mid-1970s to 68% from 2012-2018.

The same goes for Illinois and Michigan. According to National Cancer Institute State Cancer Profiles data, these states, which include OSF HealthCare hospitals, have seen similar declining trends for all cancers as at the national level due to targeted prevention, screening, and early detection interventions.

“Certainly it’s great news. We always want to see decreases in cancer deaths year after year,” says Dr. Iftekhar Ahmad, a radiation oncologist with OSF HealthCare. “There can be a lot of reasons for it. I think first and foremost is earlier detection, meaning that we’re finding the cancers when they’re smaller, when they haven’t spread anywhere else in the body. And anytime you find cancers in earlier stage, the prognosis is much better and the chances of dying from cancer are very low.”

Dr. Ahmad adds that treatment options have improved over the last decade, helping the survival rates for even stage two and stage three cancers. The types of cancer with the highest survival rates are thyroid (98%), prostate (97%), and testicular (95%).

There are many factors that contribute to the diagnosis of cancer including the use of alcohol, high body mass index and smoking.

“Smoking plays a very big role in cancer in general, not just lung cancer, but in all cancers,” says Dr. Ahmad. “Statistics have shown that despite the reduction in the number of people who are smoking in this country, there’re still quite a few smokers. I think we’ve made a lot of progress, but there’s always room for improvement because smoking has a really negative impact on your health overall.”

The care and treatment of cancer took a significant hit a couple of years ago when the COVID-19 pandemic caused fear among many, including those with cancer. Patients opted to skip or delay cancer screenings and treatments out of fear of COVID-19 exposure, despite numerous safeguards put in place by medical facilities. Patients are increasingly returning for important screenings and treatment.

“I think what that does is highlight the importance of screening tests,” says Dr. Ahmad. “We have some very good screening tests for breast cancer, for colon cancer and we need to make use of those. We have very good lung cancer screening now which didn’t exist 10 years ago, and if you’ve been a smoker for certain amount of years you can take advantage of that technology.”

However, not all news was positive on the cancer front. The report highlighted that breast, uterine and prostate cancers are slightly rising around the country.

“The rise of the cancer is a tricky question to answer because some of that can be attributed or related to increased detection,” says Dr. Ahmad. “So it’s not always that the actual number of cancer is increased or things are getting worse. It's just that they're being found. So that’s one kind of you take it with a grain of salt. Especially for something like prostate cancer, which is in its early forms not very aggressive, to the point where there are non-treatment options for early stage prostate cancer, called active surveillance, where we just watch it and most of the time nothing happens to it.”

In 2023 the ACS estimates there could be nearly two million new cases, which is about 5,000 cases a day, and more than 600,000 cancer deaths in the U.S., which Dr. Ahmad says, is on par with previous years.

The report was a shot in the arm for the government’s “Cancer Moonshot” program, which has a goal to reduce the death rate from cancer by at least 50% in the next 25 years.

“As much as we know about cancer, as far as we've come in the last 20 or 30 years, we still have we still have a long way to go,” adds Dr. Ahmad. “But I think that information like this gives us hope, and it tells us that all the work we’re putting in, all the money we’re putting in for research and treatments, that it is having an effect and things are improving. So these efforts aren’t wasted. It's just going to take some time.”

For more information about cancer programs, visit [OSF HealthCare](#).