

Frequently Asked Questions About Cancer

For Native Americans and Alaska Natives



Cancer is the name for diseases that happen when cells—the normal small units that make up the human body—start to grow too fast in an unhealthy way. Normal cells get a signal from the body to stop growing, but cancer cells don't get this signal. They keep growing, and may form a group of cells called a tumor. Sometimes, cancer cells break off from the tumor and spread to other parts of the body.

Is cancer serious?

Some cancers can cause serious illness and even death, while other cancers grow slowly and do not need treatment. Most cancers that are serious can be treated, and some can be cured. Cancer affects different people in different ways. If you have been told you have cancer, talk to your doctor about which treatment options are right for you.

Will I get cancer?

Cancer is the second leading cause of death among Native Americans and Alaska Natives. Anyone can get cancer, but some people have a higher risk. We can control some risks. For example, we know that smoking causes many kinds of cancer, and quitting smoking can lower your risk of getting these cancers. Other risks we can't control, like getting older or having a family history of cancer.

Native Americans and Alaska Natives get most kinds of cancer at lower rates than white people. But rates of stomach, liver, cervix, kidney, and gallbladder cancers are higher among these groups.

How can I lower my risk?

Things You Can Do

- Be active and exercise, and keep a healthy body weight.
- Learn about hepatitis B and HPV shots, which can prevent cancer.
- Talk to your doctor about getting screened for breast, cervical, and colon cancers.
- Protect yourself from the sun when you're outdoors.

Things You Can Avoid

- Don't smoke, and avoid smoke from other people's cigarettes.
- Don't drink too much alcohol.

More Information

Division of Cancer Prevention and Control
National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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