

Why are there differences in incidence rates of breast cancer?

Some groups are more likely than others to have certain risk factors for breast cancer. This may help explain why incidence rates vary. Risk factors that vary by race and ethnicity include:

- Age at first childbirth
- Age at first period
- Age at menopause
- Body weight
- Breastfeeding
- Menopausal hormone therapy use (postmenopausal hormone use)
- Number of childbirths

Studies are looking at other reasons.

Removing barriers to screening

Screening tests include mammography, clinical breast exam and breast MRI. These tests along with follow-up tests and treatment, if needed, can reduce the chance of dying from breast cancer.

Barriers may make it hard for some women to get screened or follow-up if they have an abnormal mammogram or physical exam.

The following may help.

- Increase access to screening and care
- Remove financial barriers
- Address cultural and language differences
- Educate about breast cancer risks and screening methods
- Ensure health care providers are sensitive to the needs of women from different backgrounds. (For example, when a doctor doesn't recommend a mammogram, some women think they don't need one.)

Resources

SUSAN G. KOMEN®

1-877 GO KOMEN
(1-877-465-6636)
komen.org

AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY

800-ACS-2345
cancer.org

INTERCULTURAL CANCER COUNCIL

iccnetwork.org

NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE

1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237)
cancer.gov

Related fact sheets in this series:

- [Breast Cancer & Risk](#)
- [Breast Cancer Screening and Follow-up Tests](#)

For information about breast cancer and national and local resources, such as low cost mammography, financial assistance and other support services call our breast care helpline at **1-877 GO KOMEN** (1-877-465-6636) or email at helpline@komen.org.

***Note:** The term "Black" is used in this resource as a term inclusive of those who identify as Black, African American, multi-cultural, or as new or recent immigrants.

©2020 Susan G. Komen®. 9/20



Racial and Ethnic Differences in Breast Cancer

susan g. komen. 

FACTS FOR LIFE

Breast cancer is the most common cancer among women. Yet, the rates of getting and dying from breast cancer differ by race and ethnicity.

Black women*

Overall, the number of new breast cancer cases (incidence) among Black women is slightly lower than in white women in the U.S. For women under 40, the number of new cases is higher in Black women than white women. The reasons for this are under study.

In the U.S., Black women have about a 40 percent higher death rate than white women. This could be due to:

- Differences in the make-up of the tumor
- Later stage of breast cancer at diagnosis
- Barriers to high-quality care (such as not having health insurance)
- Risk factors (such as being [overweight or obese](#))
- Health behaviors (such as [not completing treatment](#))

In the past, Black women were less likely than white women to get regular screening mammograms. Even after looking at income, past screening rates and access to care, Black women have more advanced breast cancers at diagnosis and have worse survival than white women in the U.S.

Hispanic and Latina women

The number of new breast cancer cases and death rates for Hispanic and Latina women are lower than white and Black women. Yet, breast cancer is the most common cancer and the leading cause of cancer death among this group.

Hispanic and Latina women tend to have later stage breast cancers than white women at

diagnosis. This may be due to lower screening rates or delays in follow-up after an abnormal mammogram.

Hispanic and Latina women may be less likely than white women to get high-quality and timely breast cancer care. It's not known if this affects breast cancer survival in Hispanic and Latina women.

Asian American and Pacific Islander women

The number of new breast cancer cases is lower for Asian American and Pacific Islander women than white and Black women. Rates vary among Asian American ethnic groups. For instance, the number of new cases is higher among Samoan American and Hawaiian women than Chinese American and Vietnamese American women.

Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in Asian American women.

Also, Asian American women have slightly lower rates of breast cancer screening than Black and white women.

American Indian and Alaska Native women

The number of new breast cancer cases for American Indian and Alaska Native women vary based on where they live. Women who live in Alaska and the Southern Plains have the highest rates (like white women). Women who live in the East and Southwest have the lowest rates.

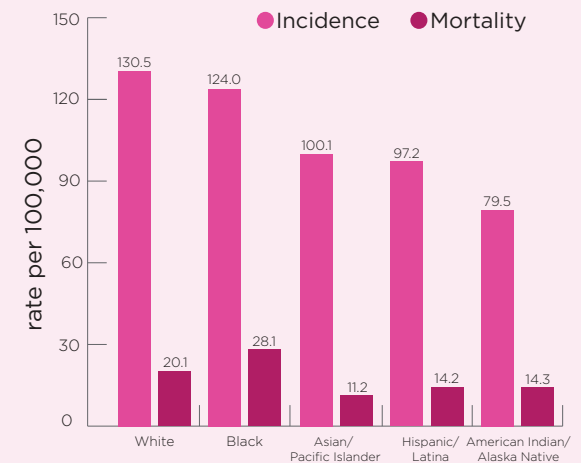
Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in this ethnic group.

Although more data are needed, American Indian and Alaska Native women have slightly lower rates of breast cancer screening than Black and white women.

Immigrants to the U.S.

New immigrants to the U.S. tend to have breast cancer rates close to those in their home countries. The daughters and granddaughters of immigrants tend to have risk close to women born in the U.S. This may be because they adopt an American lifestyle, including being overweight or having children later in life.

Breast Cancer Incidence and Mortality in U.S. Women by Race and Ethnicity, 2012-2016



©Source: SEER Cancer Statistics Review, 1975-2017, 2020

Terms:

Incidence rate shows the number of **new** breast cancer cases each year. It's written as the number of cases per 100,000 people.

Mortality rate shows the number of breast cancer **deaths** in a group of people over a period of time. It's written as the number of deaths per 100,000 people.