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Cancer Prevalence: How Many People Have Cancer?

What is cancer prevalence?

Cancer prevalence is defined as the number of living people who have ever been diagnosed with cancer. It includes people diagnosed with cancer in the past as well as those who were recently diagnosed. It does *not* include the number of [people who may develop cancer in their lifetime](#)¹.

Cancer prevalence is determined by how often a cancer occurs (*incidence*) and by how long people normally live after diagnosis (*survival*). This means prevalence counts are highest for the most common cancers with the longest survival. And, a common cancer with shorter survival may have a lower prevalence count than a less common cancer with longer survival.

For example, although [lung cancer](#)² is one of the most common cancers in both men and women, the prevalence count for lung cancer is lower than that for [non-Hodgkin lymphoma](#)³, a less common cancer. This is because people with non-Hodgkin lymphoma survive longer than those with lung cancer, so there are more people living after a diagnosis of non-Hodgkin lymphoma than after a diagnosis of lung cancer.

The numbers

The numbers on this chart are prevalence counts from the American Cancer Society's [Cancer Treatment & Survivorship Facts & Figures 2019-2021](#)⁴, a collaboration with the National Cancer Institute. These estimates do not include carcinoma in situ (non-invasive cancer) of any site except [urinary bladder](#)⁵, nor do they include [basal cell or squamous cell skin cancers](#)⁶.

Estimated numbers of survivors for the 10 most prevalent cancer sites among males and females in the United States as of January 1, 2019.

Males	Females
Prostate	Breast
3,650,030 (45%)	3,861,520 (44%)
Colon & rectum	Uterine corpus
776,120 (10%)	807,860 (9%)
Melanoma	Colon & rectum
684,470 (8%)	768,650 (9%)
Urinary bladder	Thyroid
624,490 (8%)	705,050 (8%)
Non-Hodgkin lymphoma	Melanoma
400,070 (5%)	672,140 (8%)
Kidney	Non-Hodgkin lymphoma
342,060 (4%)	357,650 (4%)
Testis	Lung and bronchus
287,780 (4%)	313,140 (4%)
Lung and bronchus	Cervix
258,200 (3%)	283,120 (3%)
Leukemia	Ovary
256,790 (3%)	249,230 (3%)
Oral cavity and pharynx	Kidney
249,330 (3%)	227,510 (3%)
All cancer sites	All cancer sites

8,138,790**8,781,580**

A few facts about these survivors

- The majority of cancer survivors (67%) were diagnosed 5 or more years ago.
- 18% of cancer survivors were diagnosed 20 or more years ago.
- Nearly two-thirds (64%) of cancer survivors are 65 years of age or older.

The National Cancer Survivorship Resource Center

The National Cancer Survivorship Resource Center (The Survivorship Center) is a collaboration between the American Cancer Society and the George Washington Cancer Institute, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Its goal is to shape the future of post-treatment cancer survivorship care and to improve the quality of life of cancer survivors. To find out more about The Survivorship Center's activities, visit www.cancer.org/survivorshipcenter⁷.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-basics/lifetime-probability-of-developing-or-dying-from-cancer.html
2. www.cancer.org/cancer/lung-cancer.html
3. www.cancer.org/cancer/non-hodgkin-lymphoma.html
4. www.cancer.org/research/cancer-facts-statistics/survivor-facts-figures.html
5. www.cancer.org/cancer/bladder-cancer.html
6. www.cancer.org/cancer/basal-and-squamous-cell-skin-cancer.html
7. www.cancer.org/health-care-professionals/national-cancer-survivorship-resource-center.html

References

American Cancer Society. *Cancer Treatment & Survivorship Facts & Figures 2019-2021*. Atlanta, Ga: American Cancer Society; 2019.

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