

The Critical Facts

There is no prevention. There is no cure. Breast cancer knows no boundaries of race or class.

Number of Breast Cancer Cases in the United States

Breast cancer is the most common cancer among women, excluding cancers of the skin. More than 2 million women are living with the disease.¹ In 2007, breast cancer will account for nearly one out of every four cancer diagnoses in women.²

An estimated 178,480 women will be diagnosed with invasive breast cancer in 2007. This number does not include cases of carcinoma in situ. An estimated 62,030 new cases of breast carcinoma in situ will be diagnosed in 2007. Of these, 85% will be ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS).³

If every woman lived to age 85, one out of eight women in the United States would develop breast cancer by that time—a “lifetime” risk that was one out of 14 in 1980.⁴ A new breast cancer case is diagnosed every 2.2 minutes.⁵

Men develop breast cancer, too, although they account for approximately 1% of cases. In 2007 an estimated 2,030 cases will be diagnosed in men.⁶

Breast Cancer Risk

Breast cancer knows no racial boundaries. Overall, white women are most likely to be diagnosed with breast cancer, while black women are more likely to die from the disease.⁷ For women under age 35, black women have a higher incidence than white women.⁸

Risk increases with age. The chance of a woman under the age of 39 developing breast cancer is 1 in 210. From ages 40-59 it is 1 in 25, from ages 60-69 it is 1 in 27 and from ages 70 and older it is 1 in 15.⁹

Every woman is at risk for breast cancer. More than 50% of breast cancers occur in women who have no identifiable risk factors other than age.¹⁰ Only 5 to 10% of breast cancers are linked to inherited mutations in BRCA1 and BRCA 2 genes.¹¹

Mortality Rates

Cancer accounts for 1 in every 4 deaths in the U.S. and kills more people than any other cause, except for heart disease.¹²

In the U.S., breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death among women as a whole (lung cancer is the first).¹³ In 2007, an estimated 40,910 deaths will be attributed to breast cancer (40,460 women, 450 men).¹⁴ A woman dies from breast cancer every 13 minutes.¹⁵

Black women with breast cancer are dying younger than other women with breast cancer. The median age at death for white breast cancer patients is 70 years; for black breast cancer patients it is 61 years.¹⁶

Survival Rates

89% of women diagnosed with breast cancer 5 years ago are still alive. Of those diagnosed 10 years ago, 80% are still alive; of those diagnosed 20 years ago, 63% are still alive.¹⁷

According to the most recent cancer statistics review, black women are less likely than white women to survive 5 years after a breast cancer diagnosis: 77% versus 90% respectively.¹⁸

Five-year survival rates also vary according to age of diagnosis: 83% for women under age 45, 87% for women aged 45-54, and just over 88% for women age 55 and older.¹⁹

Mammography

Mammograms do not prevent breast cancer. They detect tumors, but can miss more than a 1/4 of all breast cancers.²⁰ Additionally, mammograms can cause “false positive” results when a mammogram finds something in the breast that, on biopsy, proves not to be cancer. As many as 3/4 of all post-mammogram biopsy results turn out to be benign lesions.²¹

Mammography may not be effective in detecting breast cancer for women who are pre-menopausal. Although 50 is often used as the estimated age for women to begin menopause, it is not an accurate indicator of menopausal status. Because the breast tissue of pre-

menopausal women tends to be denser than that of post-menopausal women, mammograms of younger women may be more difficult to read.²²

Income

A lack of medical insurance and poor access to screening and treatment decrease survival. Low-income breast cancer patients have 5-year relative survival rates that are 9% lower than higher-income patients. Low-income African American women are three times more likely than higher-income African American women to be diagnosed with advanced disease.²³

Insurance

In 2004, only 40% of uninsured women reported having had a mammogram in the past two years, compared with 74% of insured women.²⁴

Uninsured women and women on Medicaid are more likely to be diagnosed at a later stage of breast cancer and are 30-50% more likely to die than women with private health insurance.²⁵

Approximately 48 million people in the United States had no health insurance coverage in 2005.²⁶

The Environment

In 2004, U.S. industries reported the release of 4.24 billion pounds of toxic chemicals.²⁷ In general, this represents only a portion of all toxic chemical releases nationwide because not all facilities, and not all toxic chemicals, are required to be reported. Additionally, TRI data reflect disposal or other releases and other waste management of chemicals, and not exposures of the public to those chemicals.²⁸

An estimated 80,000 chemicals are in commercial use today.²⁹ More than 90% have never been tested for human health effects.³⁰

Environmental estrogens, chemicals foreign to the body that mimic estrogen (which controls the growth of breast cells) are found in what we eat, drink, breathe, and in compounds we use at work, home, and in the garden. So far, 100 chemicals have been found to be estrogenic.³¹

Today, 216 commonly used chemicals are known to induce breast tumors in laboratory animals.³²

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