

Colorectal (Bowel) Cancer in Queensland 1982 to 2005

Viertel Centre for Research in Cancer Control

The Cancer Council Queensland report *Current Status of Colorectal Cancer in Queensland, 1982 to 2005*, published recently by the Viertel Centre for Research in Cancer Control, provides an in-depth description of colorectal cancer statistics in Queensland. The publication reports on the number of people diagnosed with colorectal cancer, the length of time they survive after being diagnosed, the number of deaths caused by colorectal cancer, as well as trends in colorectal cancer and geographical differences within Queensland. The report is based on the most recent data released by the Queensland Cancer Registry.

What causes colorectal cancer?

- While the exact causes of colorectal cancer are unknown, the main factors shown to increase a person's risk of being diagnosed with colorectal cancer include older age, a family history of colorectal cancer, inherited and inflammatory diseases of the bowel, poor diet, lack of exercise and being overweight or obese.

How many people are diagnosed with colorectal cancer?

- In 2005 there were 2601 colorectal cancer cases diagnosed in Queensland (1430 males and 1171 females).
- Between 2001 and 2005, colorectal cancers accounted for 13% of all new cancers diagnosed among both males and females. It was the third most commonly diagnosed cancer in males and the second most commonly diagnosed cancer in females.
- Nearly all colorectal cancers (93%) were diagnosed among people aged 50 years or older.

How long do people diagnosed with colorectal cancer survive?

- Compared to the general population, 82% of people diagnosed with colorectal cancer survived for at least one year, and 65% survived for at least five years.
- Survival among people diagnosed with colorectal cancer has improved considerably over the last two decades, with five-year relative survival increasing from 48% in 1982-1987 to 65% in 2000-2005.

How many people die from colorectal cancer?

- There were 912 deaths due to colorectal cancer in Queensland in 2005 (525 males and 387 females).
- Between 2001 and 2005 colorectal cancer was the third most common cause of cancer-related deaths among males and females in Queensland, causing 12% and 14% of all cancer-related deaths, respectively.
- Mortality rates for colorectal cancer increased sharply with age, peaking for males and females in the 85 and older age groups.
- On average, both males and females diagnosed with colorectal cancer died 11 years earlier than would otherwise be expected.

Are colorectal cancer trends changing?

- Colorectal cancer incidence rates increased until the year 2000 for males, but have since stabilised, while incidence rates have been decreasing slowly for females since 1995 (an overall decrease of 6% between 1995-2005).
- Mortality rates have been decreasing for both males and females since the mid to late 1990s by between 2% to 3% per year.
- While incidence and mortality rates are currently either stable or decreasing, the actual number of colorectal cancers diagnosed more than doubled from 1150 in 1982, to 2601 in 2005, and the number of deaths also increased from 480 to 912 during this period, due to population increases and ageing.

How do colorectal cancer rates in Queensland compare with interstate and overseas?

- The incidence of colorectal cancer in Queensland was slightly higher than the Australian average, while mortality rates were similar to the national average for both males and females.
- Colorectal cancer incidence rates in Australia were among the highest in the world and mortality rates were also higher than the average for developed countries.

Are there any geographic differences within Queensland?

- Colorectal cancer incidence rates were significantly lower for remote Queensland residents compared to people living in major cities.
- Survival rates for colorectal cancer were about 30% lower for males and 20% lower for females from regional areas compared to people in South East Queensland.
- The likelihood of surviving colorectal cancer varied according to socio-economic status among females in Queensland. Females from the most disadvantaged areas had poorer survival and those from the most affluent areas had a better chance of surviving compared to the middle socio-economic status group.

The full report is available at www.cancerqld.org.au/pdf/colorectal_report.pdf or contact research@cancerqld.org.au for more details.

An online version of the graphs contained in the report, along with corresponding information for a range of other types of cancer is available at www.cancerqld.org.au/research/QCSOL.asp