



# CANCER AUSTRALIA

## Cancers of Unknown Primary Site

### Definition

- Cancer of unknown primary site (CUP) is diagnosed when metastatic cancer is found but the place where the cancer began (the primary site) cannot be determined.
- Treatment for CUP depends on many factors, including where the metastatic cancer is found, histological analysis, and the patient's age and general health.

### Incidence and mortality

- In 2006, 3,234 new cases of Cancer of Unknown Primary were reported, accounting for 3.1 per cent of new cancers in the Australian population.
- There were 1,642 new cases of CUP in males (2.8 per cent of all new cancer cases in males) and 1,592 in females (3.5 per cent of cancer in females) reported in 2006.
- The lifetime risk of developing CUP before the age of 75 is 1 in 123, with a higher risk in males (1 in 104) than females (1 in 150).
- In 2007, there were 3,487 deaths attributed to CUP, accounting for 8.7 per cent of all cancer deaths in Australia. CUP is the third most common cause of cancer-related deaths.
- 1,832 males and 1,655 females (8.1 per cent and 9.6 per cent of cancer deaths in males and females respectively) died from CUP in 2007.
- The lifetime risk of dying from CUP before the age of 75 is 1 in 117, with a greater risk for males (1 in 97) than for females (1 in 146).

### Trends

- The rate of incidence of CUP in Australia has been declining over the last 20 years (7.2 per cent), however mortality rates have been slowly increasing (6 per cent). This trend is seen in both genders.
- The incidence and mortality rates of CUP in males and females increase after the age of 50, and continue to increase with age.

### Relative survival

- CUP has a very low relative 5 year survival.
- 13.4 per cent of males and 11.5 per cent of females affected by CUP will be alive 5 years after their diagnosis.

## Risk factors

CUP is a term that refers to many different forms of cancer. The most common primary carcinomas that initially present as CUP are carcinomas of the lung and pancreas, although colorectal, breast and prostate cancer can also present as CUP. The risk factors associated with CUP depend upon the origin of the primary carcinoma.

**Sources:** This factsheet draws on data published by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, including in:

- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2010. Australia's Health 2010. Australia's health series no. 12. Cat. no. AUS 122. Canberra: AIHW.
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Cancer Australia & Australasian Association of Cancer Registries 2008. Cancer survival and prevalence in Australia: cancers diagnosed from 1982 to 2004. Cancer series no. 42 Cat. no. CAN 38. Canberra: AIHW.
- [www.aihw.gov.au/cancer/data/acim\\_books](http://www.aihw.gov.au/cancer/data/acim_books) (viewed 15/11/2010) - 2006 incidence and 2007 mortality data.

The figures quoted relate to cancers C26, C39, C76-80 as classified under the International Classification of Diseases (ICD – 10).

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