



CANCER AUSTRALIA

Head and Neck Cancers

Definition

Head and neck cancers include cancers of the tongue, mouth, salivary glands and the various areas of the pharynx; the oro-, hypo- and nasopharynx, nasal cavities, middle ear, sinuses and larynx. The majority arise in the cells that line the mucosal surfaces of the head and mouth (squamous cell cancers) but some arise from glandular cells (adenocarcinomas).

Incidence and mortality

- In 2006, 2,756 new cases of head and neck cancers were reported (2.6 per cent of all new cancer cases).
- Males were far more likely to have a head or neck cancer, with 2,059 new cases reported, accounting for 3.5 per cent all new male cancers.
- 697 females were diagnosed with a head or neck cancer, accounting for 1.5 per cent of all new female cancers.
- The lifetime risk of developing a head or neck cancer before the age of 75 is 1 in 95, with a higher risk in males (1 in 62) than females (1 in 205).
- The most common forms of head and neck cancers in 2003* were:
 - Larynx (557 cases; 498 male, 59 female)
 - Tongue (492 cases; 343 male, 149 female)
 - Mouth (466 cases; 287 male, 179 female).
- In 2007, head and neck cancers were responsible for 898 deaths in Australia, accounting for 2.3 per cent of all cancer deaths.
- More males (667; 3 per cent of all male cancer deaths) than females (231; 1.3 per cent of all female deaths) died from head and neck cancers in 2007.
- In 2003*, the forms of head and neck cancers that caused the most deaths were:
 - Larynx (223 deaths; 196 male, 27 female)
 - Tongue (178 deaths; 120 male, 58 female)
 - Mouth (116 deaths; 71 males, 45 females)
 - Oropharynx (115 deaths; 81 males, 34 females).

Trends

- The incidence and mortality rates of head and neck cancers have been declining over the last 20 years (17 per cent and 37 per cent respectively). This decline is largely reflective of

the decrease in incidence and mortality rates in men, however males still continue to have far higher rates than females.

- Of the more common forms of head and neck cancers, the largest declines have been in the incidence of larynx cancer in men. Incidence and mortality rates of larynx and tongue cancers in females have remained relatively stable or increased slightly.
- The incidence of head and neck cancers increase with age, particularly after the age of 35 years.

Relative survival

No relative survival estimates are available for any head/neck cancers.

Risk factors

- Several risk factors have been associated with increasing the risk of head and neck cancers. These include:
 - Smoking (tobacco and marijuana)
 - Chewing tobacco
 - Frequent alcohol use
- Other risk factors that are associated with particular head and necks cancers include:
 - Sun exposure – oral cavity
 - Radiation – salivary glands
 - Asbestos – larynx
 - Human Papillomavirus (HPV) - same subtypes as cause cervical cancer

*The 2003 figures are the most current publically available disaggregated data for head and neck cancers.

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 (viewed 28/9/2010) - 2006 incidence and 2007 mortality data.

The figures quoted relate to cancers C01-C14, C30-C32 as classified under the International Classification of Diseases (ICD – 10).

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