



WHAT IS STOMACH CANCER?

Stomach cancer forms in tissues lining the stomach. **In 2022, an estimated 26,380 Americans will be diagnosed with stomach cancer, and more than 11,000 will die from the disease.** Stomach cancer is generally classified as cardia or noncardia. Cardia stomach cancer occurs in the upper part of the stomach where it meets the esophagus. Noncardia cancer occurs in all other areas of the stomach.

Diagnosing Stomach Cancer

Initial diagnosis of stomach cancer often is delayed because up to 80 percent of patients are asymptomatic during early stages.¹ Many symptoms associated with stomach cancer, including indigestion, heartburn, and nausea, are easily mistaken for other gastric problems. In parts of the world where stomach cancer is highly prevalent, aggressive screening programs have had some success in detecting early cancers and improving outcomes. Stomach cancer in the United States has been considered a poor candidate for wide-scale screening programs due to the smaller affected population.

What are the Survival Odds?

The overall 5-year relative survival rate of stomach cancer in the United States is 32 percent.² **At a late, or distant, stage, the 5-year survival rate is just six percent.**³ Survival rates are low because 80-90 percent of patients with stomach cancer present with locally advanced or metastatic tumors.⁴ Stage IV patients who beat the odds face a lifetime of cancer treatments.

Alarming Stomach Cancer Trends

Cancer that occurs in the lower stomach has been increasing among younger Americans, even though in the general population the incidence of all stomach cancers has been declining for decades, according to a recent study led by the National Cancer Institute (NCI).⁵ **The findings, based on analyzed data from the North American Association of Central Cancer Tumor Registries, show a 1.3 percent yearly increase in noncardia stomach cancer among Americans younger than age 50.**⁶ Trends are most pronounced in non-Hispanic whites, particularly women. Based on these trends, it is predicted noncardia stomach cancer incidence will be higher in women than men around 2025.⁷ By 2030, overall incidence in noncardia stomach cancer will no longer be decreasing.⁸

Two main causes of noncardia stomach cancer are infection by the bacterium *Helicobacter pylori* (*H. pylori*) and autoimmune gastritis, which occurs when a person's immune system attacks the lining of the stomach. The decrease in the prevalence of *H. pylori* infection in the United States could help explain the decline in the incidence of noncardia stomach cancer in the general population at a rate of about 2.3 percent per year.⁹ The rise in noncardia stomach cancer in younger populations, however, is alarming and requires additional study, surveillance and research.

Stomach cancer incidence (2014-2018) and mortality (2015-2019) rates by race.¹⁰

	White	Black	Asian/Pacific Islander	American Indian/ Alaska Native	Hispanic/Latinx
Incidence Male	7.4	13.3	13.1	12.8	12.0
Incidence Female	3.5	7.4	7.4	7.6	7.7
Deaths Male	3.0	7.5	6.2	7.2	6.1
Deaths Female	1.5	3.5	3.9	3.9	3.9

Rates are per 100,000 persons and are age-adjusted to the 2000 U.S. standard population.

- ¹ Layke JC1, Lopez PP. Gastric cancer: diagnosis and treatment options. *Am Fam Physician*. 2004 Mar 1;69(5):1133-40. <http://www.aafp.org/afp/2004/0301/p1133.html>
- ² American Cancer Society. *Cancer Facts & Figures 2022*. Atlanta: American Cancer Society; 2022. <https://www.cancer.org/research/cancer-facts-statistics/all-cancer-facts-figures/cancer-facts-figures-2022.html>
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Dicken B, Bigam D. Gastric Adenocarcinoma: Review and Considerations for Future Directions. *Ann Surg*. 2005 Jan; 241(1): 27–39. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1356843/>
- ⁵ William F Anderson, Charles S Rabkin, Natalie Turner, Joseph F Fraumeni, Jr, Philip S Rosenberg, M Constanza Camargo, The Changing Face of Noncardia Gastric Cancer Incidence Among US Non-Hispanic Whites, *JNCI: Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, Volume 110, Issue 6, June 2018, Pages 608–615, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jnci/djx262>
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ American Cancer Society. *Cancer Facts & Figures 2022*. Atlanta: American Cancer Society; 2022. <https://www.cancer.org/research/cancer-facts-statistics/all-cancer-facts-figures/cancer-facts-figures-2022.html>