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Canadian cancer death rate down

Wednesday, May 09, 2012 3:01 AM

Lower smoking rates, better screening and treatment account for drop, but much more needs to be done to tackle leading cause of death in Canada



TORONTO, May 9, 2012 /CNW/ - The cancer death rate in Canada is going down, resulting in nearly 100,000 lives saved over the last 20 years (1988 to 2007). Despite the drop in the death rate, cancer is still the leading cause of death in Canada. *Canadian Cancer Statistics 2012* was released today by the Canadian Cancer Society, in collaboration with the [Public Health](#) Agency of Canada and Statistics Canada.

Declines in death rates were seen in all four major cancers: lung, colorectal, breast and prostate. Between 1988 and 2007, overall death rates dropped by 21% in men and 9% in women.

A smaller decline in the women's death rate is due to the increase in lung cancer deaths among women over the same timeframe. This increase is thought to be due primarily to the fact that women's smoking rates did not begin to decline until the 1980s, whereas in men, smoking rates began to decline in the 1960s. It takes time before decreases in population-wide smoking prevalence translate into drops in lung cancer incidence and death rates.

Tobacco use, along with unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, excess [body weight](#), alcohol consumption, over-exposure to the sun and exposure to environmental and workplace carcinogens account for a substantial number of cancer diagnoses and deaths each year.

"A large body of evidence has accumulated over the last 30 years showing that about half of cancers can be prevented," says Gillian Bromfield, Director, Cancer Control Policy, Canadian Cancer Society. "Even greater gains can be made in reducing cancer rates if more is done to help Canadians embrace healthy lifestyles and if governments do more to create policies that encourage people to make these changes. The Society remains committed to informing Canadians about how they can reduce their cancer risk and advocating for governments to pass policies to make healthy choices easy choices."

Tobacco control and lung cancer

The decline in smoking rates among men is a significant reason for the overall drop in the death rate for men. The lung cancer death rate for men dropped by 30% between 1988 and 2007. Among Canadian males aged 15 and up, smoking has declined from a high of 61% in 1965 to 20% in 2010.

Among women, however, the lung cancer death rate has not dropped yet, although it has now stabilized. This is because smoking among women peaked later than among men and saw substantial declines beginning only in the 1980s.

In 1965, 38% of Canadian women smoked, compared to 14% of Canadian women who smoked in 2010.

Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death among women.

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