

The National Black Leadership Initiative on Cancer III: Community Networks Program

Lung Cancer/Tobacco Fact Sheet

Lung cancer is the uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells in one or both of the lungs. It is divided into two major types, *non-small cell lung cancer* (more common and generally grows and spreads more slowly) and *small cell lung cancer* (sometimes called *oat cell*) which grows more quickly and is more likely to spread to other organs in the body.

What everyone should know about Lung cancer:

- Lung cancer is the second most common cancer among men and women and the leading cause of cancer death in both sexes.
- Lung cancer is the leading cause of death in African-Americans.
- The mortality rate of African American males with lung cancer is 100.8 per 100,000 people, compared to 70.1 for Caucasian males.
- Cigarette smoking accounts for nearly 90% of all lung cancers.
- Scientists are studying methods of prevention using natural and synthetic materials.

Risk Factors:

Tobacco Use - Harmful substances, called *carcinogens*, in tobacco damage the cells in the lungs. Persons who smoke cigarettes, cigars and pipes have a higher risk of lung cancer than nonsmokers.

- **Lung Diseases** - Certain lung diseases, such as tuberculosis (TB) and chronic obstructive lung disease (COPD), increase a person's chance of developing lung cancer.
- **Personal History** - A person who has had lung cancer once is more likely to develop a second lung cancer compared with a person who has never had lung cancer.
- **Exposure to:**
 - **Environmental Tobacco Smoke** - The chance of developing lung cancer is increased by exposure to secondhand smoke.
 - **Radon** - Radioactive particles found in mines and may be found in some houses. It damages the cells lining the lung. Long-term exposure can lead to lung cancer.
 - **Asbestos** - Asbestos is the name of a group of minerals that occur naturally as fibers and are used in certain industries.
- **Pollution** - Researchers have found a link between lung cancer and exposure to certain air pollutants, such as by-products of the combustion of diesel and other fossil fuels.

Recognizing Signs and Symptoms:

Some common signs and symptoms of lung cancer include:

- A cough that doesn't go away and gets worse over time
- Increased sputum, changes in sputum
- Constant chest pain
- Coughing up blood
- Shortness of breath, wheezing, or hoarseness
- Repeated problems with *pneumonia* or *bronchitis*
- Swelling of the neck and face
- Loss of appetite or weight loss
- Chronic fatigue
- Unexplained weight loss

These symptoms may be caused by lung cancer or by other conditions. It is important to check with a doctor.

Prevention

Currently, there is no approved screening test for lung cancer that has been proven to improve survival or detect localized disease. However, there are many studies under way to find an appropriate screening tool.

Guidelines For Diagnosing Lung Cancer

Doctors evaluate a person's medical history, smoking history, exposure to environmental and occupational substances, and family history of cancer. The doctor also performs a physical exam and may order a chest *x-ray* and other tests. If lung cancer is suspected, *sputum* cytology (the microscopic examination of cells obtained from a deep-cough sample of mucus in the lungs) is a simple test that may be useful in detecting lung cancer. For confirmation, a *biopsy* is performed--removal of a small sample of tissue for examination under a microscope by a *pathologist*—which can show whether a person has cancer.

To find more information about smoking cessation programs, lung cancer and the hazards of tobacco use, call the American Lung Association, the Cancer Information Service at 1-800-4-CANCER, local health department or the American Cancer Society. For more information about the National Black Leadership Initiative on Cancer III, call 1-800-724-1185. (Revised 8/06)