

Liver cancer in New South Wales

Liver cancer accounts for one per cent of all new cancer in NSW and two per cent of cancer deaths.

Incidence and Mortality in 2006

- There were 424 new cases of liver cancer in 2006 (290 male, 134 female).
- There were 325 deaths from liver cancer in 2006 (216 male and 109 female).
- Liver cancer is the 18th most common cancer in NSW and 12th overall in cancer mortality.
- One in 94 males and one in 227 females will develop liver cancer by the age of 85.

Trends

From 1997 to 2006, incidence rates increased 69.9 per cent in males and 134.2 per cent in females.

From 1997 to 2006, overall mortality rates increased 62.8 per cent in males and 148.4 per cent in females.

Survival

Overall, five-year survival is 15 per cent in males and females. Survival is 20.1 per cent for localised disease.

2008 Projections

There are 555 new cases of liver cancer and 380 deaths expected in 2008.

Risk Factors

- Infection with chronic hepatitis B or C viruses substantially increases the risk of developing liver cancer.
- Cirrhosis of the liver, which can be caused by excessive alcohol consumption or the progression of the hepatitis C virus, increases the risk of liver cancer.
- Risk increases with age and mainly occurs in people aged over 55 years.
- Males are twice as likely to develop liver cancer.
- Foods contaminated with aflatoxins greatly increase the risk. Aflatoxins contaminate mostly nuts, seeds, grains and legumes. The incidence of aflatoxin contaminated food is greater in Asia and Africa.

Detection and Screening

There is no screening method for liver cancer.

Symptoms may not occur in the early stages of the disease. As the disease advances, symptoms may include abdominal pain, nausea and vomiting, jaundice (yellow skin and eyes), weight loss and tiredness. However, these are also common symptoms of other liver problems that are not cancer.

Diagnosis is performed by a doctor and may include blood marker tests, x-rays, MRI and careful biopsy.

- Liver cancer arises in the liver, the largest organ of the abdomen responsible for cleaning blood.
- Cancer that begins in the liver is uncommon, with incidence ranked 18th in NSW.
- The estimated number of new cases in NSW in 2008 is 555 and 380 deaths are expected.

Prevention

A vaccine against hepatitis B, but not hepatitis C, is available from a doctor and is effective in those without a previous exposure to the virus. Hepatitis C is passed through blood, mainly through sharing of needles and unsafe sex.

Avoidance of excessive alcohol consumption and foods contaminated with aflatoxins is also recommended.

Research

Around \$3.6 million was spent on research into upper gastrointestinal cancers, including liver cancer, in NSW between 2004 and 2006.

Data sources:

Tracey EA et al. Cancer In NSW, Incidence and Mortality Report 2006. Sydney: Cancer Institute NSW, November 2008.
Welberry H et al. Cancer Research in NSW 2001–2006. Sydney: Cancer Institute NSW. March 2008.

The NSW Government agency dedicated to the control and cure of cancer through prevention, detection, innovation, research and information.



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