

## **Cancer in Asian American Women**

### **Key Points**

#### **Vital Statistics and Social Indicators**

- There are 11.9 million Asian Americans (including those of mixed race). They comprise 4.2 percent of the total U.S. population, a 72 percent increase since 1990.
- There are about 4.8 million Asian American adult women.
- There are more than 25 Asian American ethnicities—some members of the population are fourth and fifth generation Americans, while 75 percent are recent immigrants and refugees.
- Compared to U.S. Whites, Asian Americans are relatively young (though subgroups vary) and have moderate incomes and high levels of education.
- Barriers to health care for Asian American, including cultural beliefs that are inconsistent with Westernized health care, are greatest for recent immigrants and non-English speaking persons.

#### **Cancer Rates, Mortality, and Risk Factors**

- Breast, colorectal, and lung cancers are the most commonly diagnosed cancer types among Asian American women.
- Asian Americans' cancer survival rates are similar to survival rates for U.S. Whites, with significant subgroup variation. Mortality rates for most major cancers are lower than for Whites.
- Overall age-adjusted cancer incidence and mortality rates for Asian American women are lower than those of most other racial/ethnic groups in the United States.
- The Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results registries collect cancer data on a high proportion of all Asian Americans.
- Incidence and mortality trends among Asian American women for most cancers are showing decreases during the 1990s that are similar to those for White women.
- There is great variation between regional and other subgroups, and complex patterns of association exist for immigrants compared to U.S.-born Asian Americans.
- A major avoidable cancer risk factor for women in some Asian American groups is inadequate screening for cervical and breast cancer.

#### **Data Limitations and Future Directions**

- Cancer data on Asian American women have several limitations, including the combining of groups from different countries of origin, some racial misclassification, and insufficient numbers from which to draw conclusions for smaller subgroups.
- Recent cancer prevention and control initiatives have demonstrated that neighborhood-based, culturally sensitive interventions can increase breast and cervical cancer screening in Asian American women.
- As new generations of Asian Americans become acculturated in the United States, an important challenge is to prevent risky behaviors such as tobacco use and poor diet, and resulting health risks such as obesity.