

Cancer in Mexican American Women: Key Points

Vital Statistics and Social Indicators

- Mexican Americans number more than 20 million and represent more than half of the Hispanic population in the United States.
- There are more than 10 million Mexican American women living in the United States.
- Most Mexican Americans live in the states of California, Texas, Illinois, Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado.
- Compared to American women overall, Mexican American women are relatively young, are less educated with lower incomes, are more often heads of households, and are less likely to have health insurance.

Cancer Rates, Mortality, and Risk Factors

- The most common types of cancer among Mexican American women are cervical, breast, and colorectal cancers.
- Mexican American women are about twice as likely as White women to have a cancer diagnosed by age 44.
- For all cancer types combined, Mexican American women have lower cancer incidence rates than non-Hispanic White women in four of the five states where most Mexican Americans live.
- While the overall cancer mortality rates for women are lower in the Hispanic population compared with the non-Hispanic White population, cancer mortality rates are higher in Hispanic women for cancers of the digestive system, lung, and breast.
- While Mexican American women once tended to be diagnosed at later stages of breast and cervical cancers than non-Hispanic White women, that disparity may be decreasing somewhat.
- Screening tests for female cancers are underutilized by Mexican American women, though use has increased in recent years through targeted intervention programs.
- Mexican American women have relatively low rates of tobacco use and high rates of obesity.

Data Limitations and Future Directions

- Efforts should be undertaken to develop a single source of reliable data on cancer rates, mortality, and survival in Mexican American women.
- Increased surveillance and research are necessary to gain a greater understanding of cancer incidence, mortality, and survival in the Mexican American population.
- Data are needed to better distinguish Mexican Americans from other Hispanic subgroups.
- A worthwhile aim of future cancer prevention activities is counteracting the adoption of risk-increasing negative behaviors and reinforcing the maintenance of lifestyle choices as Mexican Americans continue to acculturate into the U.S. ways of life.