

Cancer in American Samoan Women: Key Points

Vital Statistics and Social Indicators

- There are about 118,000 American Samoans in total, most of whom live in the U.S. Territory of American Samoa and in a few urban areas of the United States.
- Of the adult American Samoan population, about 40,000 are women.
- Compared with U.S. women overall, American Samoan women are relatively young (median age 22 years); have large families and low levels of education; and often speak a language other than English.
- American Samoans have among the lowest per capita incomes and highest poverty rates of all American ethnic groups.

Cancer Rates, Mortality, and Risk Factors

- The most common types of cancer among American Samoan women are cancers of the breast, uterus, lung, stomach, and ovary.
- Cancers are diagnosed at earlier ages and at more advanced stages in American Samoan women than in U.S. White women.
- American Samoan women's decisions about whether to seek health care may be influenced by their belief that many conditions are not treatable with Western medicine.

Data Limitations and Future Directions

- A better tumor registry for American Samoans is needed—the fact that there are few tracked cancer cases and no reliable population estimates for this group makes drawing reliable conclusions difficult.
- There is a need to gain a better understanding of American Samoans' health beliefs to help explain the population's cancer-related knowledge, attitudes, and practices.
- There is a lack of understanding of the reasons for differences between American Samoan women and other ethnic groups in key cancer indicators.
- The following questions could be researched in the future: Why do American Samoan women develop cancer at an early age? Why are they more likely than White women to be diagnosed with cancer at an advanced stage? What contributes to the differences in frequencies of various cancers in American Samoan women compared with White women?