

# Community Cancer Concerns Information Sheet

**People sometimes worry about more cancer cases in their neighborhood. The following explains why it may seem there are more cases when the number is really normal for the area.**

## Facts about Cancer

- Cancer is the uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells. These cells can spread throughout the body.
- Cancer includes more than 100 diseases.
- Different cancers have different risk factors that increase the chance of getting them.
- Smoking is a risk factor for several cancers, such as lung, bladder, and oral cancers. Other risk factors include
  - Alcohol
  - Diet
  - Obesity
  - Lack of exercise
  - Exposure to UV radiation from sunlight
  - Hormone levels
  - Family history of cancer
  - Exposure to infectious agents, such as human papillomavirus (HPV)
- The external environment in air, water, or soil can raise risk.
- Cancer can take a long time to form after exposure. That makes it hard to find the cause.
- Cancer is common. About one in two men and one in three women in the United States will find they have cancer at some point. Cancer is the second leading cause of death in this nation.
- The risk of cancer increases with age, and many people now live longer. Cancer screening, diagnosis, and treatment have improved. It is common to know several people who have or had cancer.

## Cancer clusters

- A cancer cluster is more cancer cases than expected in one place or group of people.
- A suspected cancer cluster is more likely to be real if it shows:
  - Many cases of one type of cancer, instead of several different types
  - A rare type of cancer, instead of common types
  - More cases of a type of cancer in an age group that usually does not get it
- Epidemiologists study how often diseases occur in groups of people. They look at cancer cases in an area to find out if there are more than usual. They compare this with what is known about the group and the cancer.
- To do this work, epidemiologists need information about:
  - Types of cancer
  - People affected
  - Dates diagnosed
  - Ages
  - Where people lived and how long
- Sometimes, something in an area can increase the chance of getting cancer. To understand possible risks, it helps to know:
  - Who may have been exposed
  - How much they were exposed
  - How long they were exposed
- It is hard to interpret data from small numbers of cancers in a small population. Even one case can greatly change the cancer rate.
- Most suspected cancer clusters are not true clusters. Many happen by chance with no clear cause.
- Examples of confirmed clusters are:
  - Mesothelioma in asbestos workers
  - Leukemia in atomic bomb survivors
  - Liver tumors in workers exposed to vinyl chloride
  - Lung cancer in areas with high radon levels

These all involved very high exposures to something that can cause cancer.

The Oregon State Cancer Registry (OSCaR) collects information about all reportable cancers in Oregon. OSCaR compares local cancer rates with statewide rates to find out if they are more than expected. Below are some useful resources.

## Cancer cluster information

- **National Cancer Institute**  
<http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Risk/clusters>
- **U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) information**  
<https://www.cdc.gov/cancer-environment/about/>

## General cancer information

Information about cancer, its causes and risk factors:

- **National Cancer Institute**  
<http://www.cancer.gov/>
- **U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**  
<http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/>
- **American Cancer Society**  
<http://www.cancer.org/>

## Cancer statistics for Oregon

- **Cancer Data**  
<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/DISEASES/CONDITIONS/CHRONICDISEASE/DATAREPORTS/Pages/Cancer-Incidence.aspx>
- **Oregon Tracking Data Explorer**  
<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/HEALTHYENVIRONMENTS/TRACKINGASSESSMENT/ENVIRONMENTALPUBLICHEALTHTRACKING/Pages/Data-Explorer.aspx>

OSCaR may share more statistics as long as doing so does not break confidentiality rules. OSCaR cannot release cancer data for areas smaller than a county. OSCaR cannot release data about specific people with cancer. This is still true even if the data is about them.

## Cancer statistics for other states and the United States

- **National Cancer Institute**  
<http://www.cancer.gov/statistics/>
- **North American Association of Central Cancer Registries (NAACCR)**  
<http://www.naacr.org>
- **Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results (SEER) Program, National Cancer Institute**  
<http://seer.cancer.gov>

## Guidelines for specific cancer data questions

- **Cancer Data Inquiries**  
<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/DISEASES/CONDITIONS/CHRONICDISEASE/CANCER/Pages/Cancer-Data-Inquiries.aspx>

## Toxic air contaminants from industrial sources

- **Cleaner Air Oregon**  
<https://www.oregon.gov/deq/aq/cao>

## Other environmental concerns

- **Environmental Public Health Assessments**  
<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/HealthyEnvironments/TrackingAssessment/EnvironmentalHealthAssessment/Pages/index.aspx>

You can get this document in other languages, large print, braille or a format you prefer free of charge. Contact Oregon Cancer Inquiries Review Team at [oscar.ohd@odhsoha.oregon.gov](mailto:oscar.ohd@odhsoha.oregon.gov) or 971-673-0984 (voice). We accept all relay calls.

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200-868900 (03/2026)