

Cancer Registry Data

[Announcer] *This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.*

[Reed Walton] Cancer is not just *one* disease—there are many different types. To understand how cancer affects people and places in this country, we need to know what cancers are diagnosed, where they happen, and whether what we’re doing to control and prevent cancer is working. To do this, we need data. CDC helps states collect data on cases of cancer using cancer registries. I’m Reed Walton, and I’m here with Dr. Loria Pollack to talk about these registries. Loria, first, tell me why information on cancer cases is important.

[Loria Pollack] Cancer touches everyone in some way. The information we get from looking at cancer data is the cornerstone for measuring how well we, as a nation, are helping to prevent and control this deadly disease. For the past twenty-five years, through its National Program of Cancer Registries, or NPCR, CDC funds and gives technical support to states to collect data on every new case of cancer.

[Reed Walton] Did you say, “*Every* new cancer case?”

[Loria Pollack] Yes. NPCR collects data on 96 percent of the U.S. population. Along with the National Cancer Institute’s cancer registry system, coverage reaches a hundred percent. That means *every new* cancer diagnosed in this country is recorded.

[Reed Walton] And what do we do with that information?

[Loria Pollack] We use it to look at how the number and type of cancer cases differs among different groups of people. The data can guide research studies on how to prevent or treat cancer. We also measure our progress in cancer control by looking at whether cancer rates are going up or down. But it doesn’t stop there. One of the most important ways cancer registries help us is that, once we see where cancer is happening more often, where people are dying more often, or who is being affected most, we are able to design and deliver public health programs to those places.

[Reed Walton] What do these public health programs do?

[Loria Pollack] The goal is to reduce the number of people who are diagnosed with or who die from cancer.

[Reed Walton] Have you seen it work?

[Loria Pollack] Yes! In my fifteen years at CDC, I’ve seen this happen with colorectal cancer, for example. When we increased screening by making people more aware of the risk and targeting places and people in the country, years later we saw the rates of new colorectal cancer cases, and then deaths, went down. It’s a public health success story.

[Reed Walton] And let me guess. You found out these rates were going down because of the information you got from cancer registries.

[Loria Pollack] Exactly. Registries are the best tool we have for finding patterns of cancer in the country and deciding what to do about them. Without registries, we couldn't fight cancer as effectively. That's a fact.

[Reed Walton] Where does the information in cancer registries come from?

[Loria Pollack] Anywhere cancer is diagnosed or treated. This includes hospitals, doctors' offices, and labs. Reports from these places tell us what organ it started in and the kind of cells in the cancer. It also tells us the person's age, race, the area of the country they're in, and what kind of treatment was recommended. Sometimes we get multiple pieces of information from different records to make a complete story for a person's cancer. We have ways to put the pieces together to make sure it's complete. The more information we can collect on a specific case, the better. Registries provide a census of cancer in the United States.

[Reed Walton] And can *anybody* see and explore this information?

[Loria Pollack] Yes. In fact, we encourage it. We have a new way for anyone, not just scientists, to look at the most recent cancer numbers. Information on all cancer or specific types of cancer is available for the entire country, by individual state, and over time. This website has interactive maps and graphs, some with interpretation to help explain the story behind the numbers. You can access it at cdc.gov/cancer/dataviz, d-a-t-a-v-i-z.

[Reed Walton] Thank you, Loria, for telling us about this valuable resource. For more information about cancer registries, go to cdc.gov/cancer/npcr.

[Announcer] *For the most accurate health information, visit cdc.gov, or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.*