~233,000 women are living with ovarian cancer in the United States
5th leading cause of cancer deaths among women

Although it is not the most common cancer, ovarian cancer—a cancer originating in the ovaries, fallopian tubes, or peritoneum (membrane in the abdomen)—causes more deaths than any other gynecologic cancer. A woman’s risk of getting ovarian cancer during her lifetime is 1 in 78, and her lifetime chance of dying from ovarian cancer is 1 in 108.

Rate of New Ovarian Cancers (per 100,000)*

- 10.1 American Indian & Alaska Native
- 9.4 White
- 8.5 Asian & Pacific Islander
- 8.4 Hispanic
- 7.8 Black

Risk Factors

- Age (most ovarian cancers develop after menopause)
- Family history
- Certain genetic mutations (e.g., BRCA1, BRCA2)**
- Fertility treatments
- Having endometriosis

Some factors that have been shown to reduce the risk of developing ovarian cancer include:

- Long term use of contraceptives
- Pregnancy and breastfeeding
- Certain surgical procedures, such as tubal ligation or hysterectomy

It is important that women and their health care providers discuss the risks and benefits of each factor to promote preventive care options for ovarian cancer.

Screening Tests

Currently, there are no recommended screening guidelines for ovarian cancer, so it is challenging for women to get the benefit of early detection for this disease. Common symptoms women with ovarian cancer might experience include bloating, pelvic or abdominal pain, trouble eating, or urinary symptoms (e.g., urgency, frequency). While these symptoms may seem broad, women are encouraged to be mindful of them and raise concerns with their health care providers if symptoms increase in frequency or severity over time.
Diagnosing Ovarian Cancer

- **Transvaginal ultrasound** uses sound waves to create an image of the ovaries, looking for tumors or fluid-filled cysts.
- **Biopsy** removes and tests a mass or tumor for the presence of cancer cells; for ovarian cancer, this is often done after surgery.
- **Blood tests** check for certain tumor biomarkers associated with ovarian cancer (e.g., CA-125 protein, human chorionic gonadotropin (hCG), or blood counts).

While Black and Hispanic women have lower incidence of ovarian cancer, they are more likely to have a later-stage diagnosis compared to white women, reportedly due to economic inequalities, structural racism, and provider bias.

Policy Opportunities

- **Clinical Guidelines Development** Congress must prioritize robust, sustained investments in ovarian cancer research, with a focus to develop clinical guidelines for screening and diagnosing ovarian cancer. All federal research—whether funded by the National Institutes of Health or through the Department of Defense Ovarian Cancer Research Program—plays a critical role in improving such outcomes.


References


* Non-white women have been underrepresented in epidemiological ovarian cancer studies

** Some women, including those who have relatives with breast or ovarian cancer or are of Ashkenazi Jewish ancestry, have a higher risk for BRCA gene mutations than others.