

Are Cancer Rates Declining Among People Living With HIV?

Certain malignancies remain a concern.

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Rates of most types of cancer are falling or stable among people living with HIV, according to findings from a large cohort study reported in JAMA Oncology. Cancers related to immune suppression continue to decline, but HIV-positive people remain at substantially higher risk for anal and liver cancer compared with the population at large. Rates of some common malignancies, such as breast, prostate and colon cancers, declined or stayed about the same among both HIV-positive and HIV-negative people, so comparative rates (known as standardized incidence ratios) did not change, “suggesting that incidence trends in people with HIV reflected those in the general population,” wrote study authors Meredith Shiels, PhD, of the National Cancer Institute, and colleagues.

Studies have shown that people living with HIV are not at greater risk for these malignancies, and HIV-positive men may actually be less likely to develop prostate cancer.

“In this cohort study, significant declines in the incidence and relative risk for cancers among people with HIV demonstrate continued progress in HIV treatment and cancer prevention,” the researchers concluded. “These estimates may provide insight into the priorities for prevention and early detection of cancer as the population of people with HIV enters ages with greater risk for cancer.”

Thanks to effective antiretroviral treatment, people with HIV are living longer and are less likely to die of AIDS-related illnesses. But the aging population is increasingly prone to chronic conditions such as cancer and cardiovascular disease. Even with effective treatment, persistent HIV infection can lead to chronic inflammation that raises the risk for a multitude of health problems. What’s more, people with HIV are more likely to smoke compared with the general population and to have hepatitis B or hepatitis C, which can cause liver cancer.

