

Ovarian Cancer in West Virginia

Symptoms¹

Ovarian cancer may cause one or more of these signs and symptoms:

- Vaginal bleeding (particularly if you are past menopause) or discharge from your vagina that is not normal for you
- Pain or pressure in the pelvic or abdominal area (the area below your stomach and in between your hip bones)
- Back pain
- Bloating, which is when the area below your stomach swells or feels full
- Feeling full quickly while eating
- A change in bathroom habits, such as a frequent urge to urinate, diarrhea, or constipation.

Pay attention to your body and know what is normal for you. These symptoms may be caused by something other than cancer, but the only way to know is to see your doctor.

Treatment is most effective when ovarian cancer is found and treated early.

For more information, please contact the West Virginia Comprehensive Cancer Program
www.wvcancer.com
304-356-4193

What Is Ovarian Cancer?¹

Cancer is a disease in which cells in the body grow out of control. Cancer is always named for the part of the body where it starts, even if it spreads to other body parts later.

When cancer starts in the ovaries, it is called ovarian cancer. Ovarian cancer causes more deaths than any other cancer of the female reproductive system.

But when ovarian cancer is found in its early stages, treatment works best.

Ovarian cancer often causes no signs or symptoms, so it is important to pay attention to your body and know what is normal for you. Symptoms may be caused by something other than cancer, but the only way to know is to see your doctor, nurse, or other health care professional.



Risk Factors¹

There is no way to know for sure if you will get ovarian cancer. Most women get it without being at high risk.

However, the following factors may increase a woman's risk for ovarian cancer:

- Middle-aged or older
- Have a genetic abnormality called BRCA1 or BRCA2
- Have had breast, uterine, or colorectal (colon) cancer
- Have never given birth or have had trouble getting pregnant
- Have an Eastern European (Ashkenazi) Jewish background
- Have endometriosis (a condition where tissue from the lining of the uterus grows elsewhere in the body)
- Have close family members (such as mother, sister, aunt, or grandmother) on either parents' side, who have had ovarian cancer
- In addition, some studies suggest that women who take estrogen by itself (without progesterone) for 10 or more years may have an increased risk of ovarian cancer

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Clinical Advances²

Scientists continue to study the genes responsible for familial ovarian cancer. Research in this area has already led to better ways to detect high-risk genes and assess a woman's ovarian cancer risk. A better understanding of how genetic and hormonal factors (such as oral contraceptive use) interact may also lead to better ways to prevent ovarian cancer.



Researchers are constantly looking for clues such as lifestyle, diet, and medicines that may alter the risk of ovarian cancer. Researchers are testing new ways to screen women for ovarian cancer, and a national repository for blood and tissue samples from ovarian cancer patients is being established to aid in these studies. Targeted therapy is a newer type of cancer treatment that uses drugs or other substances to identify and attack cancer cells while doing little damage to normal cells. Another approach is to develop tumor vaccines that program the immune system to better recognize cancer cells.

Policy Changes

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force³ recommends that people do not screen for ovarian cancer. Using current testing methods, annual screening in women does not decrease ovarian cancer mortality.

Screening for ovarian cancer can lead to important harms, including major surgical interventions in women who do not have cancer. Therefore, the harms of screening for ovarian cancer outweigh the benefits.

The National Institute of Health⁴ requires the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to: (1) collaborate with nonprofit gynecologic cancer organizations to determine the best practices for providing gynecologic cancer information and outreach services to varied populations; and (2) make grants to nonprofit private entities to carry out demonstration projects to test outreach and education strategies to increase the awareness and knowledge of women and health care providers regarding gynecologic cancers.

References

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This document was produced by the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources, Bureau for Public Health, Division of Health Promotion and Chronic Disease, Comprehensive Cancer Program in partnership with the West Virginia Cancer Registry and the West Virginia Health Statistics Center.

The Comprehensive Cancer Program of the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources provided funding for this document with support from Cooperative Agreement Number 1U58DP003898-02 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Rev. September 2014

What You Can Do¹

There is no known way to prevent ovarian cancer. But these things may lower your chance of getting ovarian cancer:

- Having used birth control pills for more than five years
- Having had your tubes tied, both ovaries removed, or hysterectomy
- Having given birth

West Virginia Data

Annual incidence of ovarian cancer: 12.8 per 100,000 population.⁵

Ovarian cancer stage at diagnosis:⁵

- Local 11%
- Regional/Distant 77%
- Unknown stage 12%

The crude mortality rate for ovarian cancer among West Virginia women is 12.2 per 100,000.⁶

According to CDC Wonder⁷, West Virginia ranks among the 11 highest states for deaths due to ovarian cancer, with a rate of 8.4 deaths per 100,000.

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