

## Cancer In Hong Kong

### Key Messages

- ※ Cancer is the top killer in Hong Kong. In 2018, the disease claimed over 14 400 lives, accounting for about one-third of the year's total registered deaths in local population. With the prevailing trends in incidence and population structure, the annual number of new cancer cases is projected to increase by around 35% to more than 42 000 by 2030 from current level.
- ※ The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that around one-third of cancer deaths are due to the five leading but modifiable behavioural and dietary risks: high body mass index (BMI), lack of physical activity, low fruit and vegetable intake, alcohol use, and tobacco use. Local surveys have shown that such cancer-associated risk factors prevail among the general population.
- ※ To reduce cancer risk, members of the public are encouraged to live in healthy ways. Making an informed decision on the appropriate use of cancer screening tests as per doctor's advice and being familiar with the warning signs and symptoms of cancer allow early detection of the disease and increase the chances of successful treatment.
- ※ In July 2019, the Government launched Hong Kong Cancer Strategy (Cancer Strategy) with a vision to reduce cancer burden in the local population, improve the quality of life and survivorship of cancer patients. The Government will continue to foster co-operation across sectors as well as work in close partnership with community and members of the public to make the vision a reality. To know more about the Cancer Strategy, please visit [https://www.fhb.gov.hk/en/press\\_and\\_publications/otherinfo/190700\\_hkcs/index.html](https://www.fhb.gov.hk/en/press_and_publications/otherinfo/190700_hkcs/index.html).

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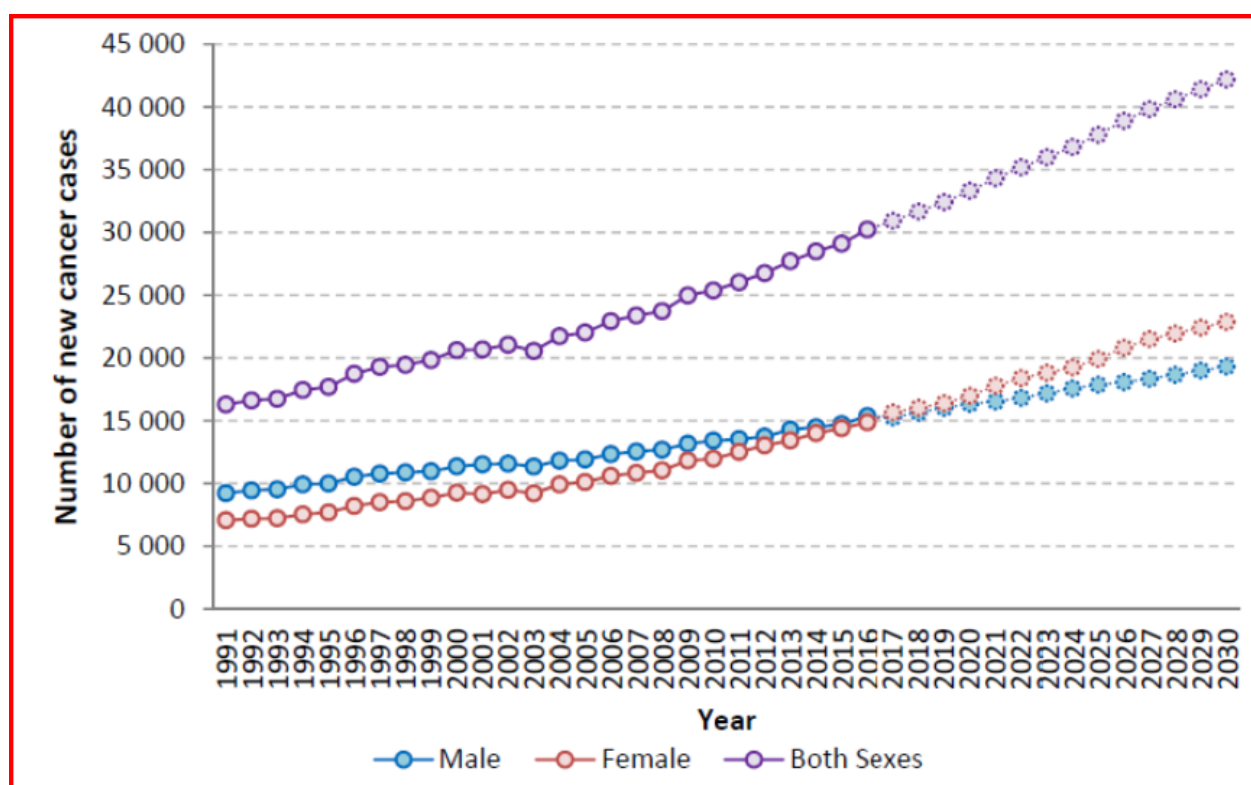
Cancer is one of the most serious human afflictions,<sup>1</sup> with an estimated 18.1 million new cancer cases and 9.6 million cancer deaths worldwide in 2018.<sup>2</sup> Globally, cancer is the second leading cause of death after cardiovascular disease.<sup>3</sup> In high-income countries, however, cancer causes twice as many deaths as cardiovascular disease among middle-aged adults.<sup>4</sup>

## Cancer is the top killer in Hong Kong with a rising trend in incidence

In Hong Kong, cancer has been the number one killer of both sexes since the 1960s. In 2018, cancer claimed over 14 400 lives, accounting for about one-third of the year's total registered deaths in local population. Lung, colorectal, liver, breast and pancreatic cancers topped the list and made up 62.6% of all registered cancer deaths. While the

age-standardised death rate of cancer dropped from 113.8 per 100 000 standard population in 2009 to 96.1 per 100 000 standard population in 2018,<sup>5</sup> the cancer incidence has been on a rising trend and increased at an average rate of about 3.1% per annum in the past decade. In 2017, the number of new cancer cases in Hong Kong hit a historical high of 33 075, with an age-standardised incidence rate of 258.0 per 100 000 standard population. The five most frequent cancers diagnosed for both genders combined were cancers of the colorectum, lung, breast, prostate and liver. Together, these five leading cancers comprised 58.3% of all new cases in 2017.<sup>6</sup> With the prevailing trends in incidence and population structure, the annual number of new cancer cases is projected to increase by around 35% to more than 42 000 by 2030 from current level (Figure 1).<sup>7</sup>

**Figure 1: Number of new cancer cases and projections to 2030**



Source: Hong Kong Cancer Registry, Hospital Authority

## Cancer-associated unhealthy lifestyle practices prevail among Hong Kong

Many factors can increase the risk of cancer development. While some risk factors are intrinsic to individuals and non-modifiable (such as sex, age and genes), many are potentially preventable, avoidable or modifiable. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that around one-third of cancer deaths are due to the five leading but modifiable behavioural and dietary risks: high body mass index (BMI), lack of physical activity, low fruit and vegetable intake, alcohol use, and tobacco use.<sup>3</sup> Local surveys have shown that such cancer-associated risk factors prevail among the general population (Figure 2).

Other preventable, avoidable or modifiable risk factors for cancer include unsafe sexual behaviours, infection with viruses or bacteria that cause cancer, such as Hepatitis B virus (HBV), Human papilloma-virus (HPV) and *Helicobacter pylori*, ultraviolet and ionizing radiation, occupational exposure to cancer-causing substances and environmental pollution.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 2: Prevalence of the five leading cancer-associated behavioural and dietary risks among Hong Kong people**



According to the weight status classification for Chinese adults living in Hong Kong, 29.9% of persons aged 15–84 were obese (i.e. BMI  $>25.0 \text{ kg/m}^2$ ) and another 20.1% were overweight (i.e. BMI:  $23.0 \text{ kg/m}^2 - <25.0 \text{ kg/m}^2$ ).<sup>8</sup>



13.0% of persons aged 18 and above had insufficient physical activity to be of benefit to health (i.e. adults should engage in at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity per week, or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity physical activity according to WHO ).<sup>8</sup>



Over 90% of persons aged 15 and above consumed less than the WHO recommended five servings of fruit and vegetables a day.<sup>8</sup>



Over half (50.4%) of persons aged 15 and above drank alcoholic beverages occasionally (i.e. drank in three days or less a month) and 11.1% drank regularly (i.e. drank at least once a week).<sup>8</sup>



One in 10 persons aged 15 and above were daily cigarette smokers.<sup>9</sup>

## Personal lifestyle choices can reduce the risk of cancer

Cancer prevention is an essential component of all cancer control plans. WHO appraises that between 30–50% of cancers can be prevented by avoiding or modifying risk factors and implementing existing

evidence-based preventive strategies.<sup>3</sup> To reduce cancer risk, members of the public are encouraged to live a healthy lifestyle (Box 1).

### Box 1: General cancer prevention tips

- ✓ Do not smoke and avoid secondhand smoke
- ✓ Avoid alcohol consumption (alcohol is a cancer-causing substance in humans as tobacco smoking and asbestos, which all belong to Group 1 Carcinogen under WHO's classification)
- ✓ Have a balanced diet with at least 5 daily servings of fruit and vegetables, limit the consumption of processed meat and red meat as well as reduce the consumption of foods high in fat, salt, or sugars
- ✓ Be physically active
- ✓ Maintain a healthy body weight and waist circumference
- ✓ Get vaccinated against HBV and HPV
- ✓ Reduce exposure to environmental carcinogens, such as overexposure to sunlight
- ✓ Observe occupational safety and health rules to minimise occupational exposure to cancer-causing substances
- ✓ Practice safer sex



( Captain AC and other Healthy League members )

## Cancer screening and early detection are crucial in fighting cancer

Cancer screening aims to detect early cancer or pre-cancerous changes before symptoms appear, so that early treatment can be initiated. Based on review of local and international evidence and practices, the Hong Kong Government's Cancer Expert Working Group on Cancer Prevention and Screening (CEWG) makes recommendations on cancer prevention and screening applicable to Hong Kong. From public health perspective, a number of factors should be carefully assessed when considering whether to introduce a population-based screening programme for a specific cancer, such as local prevalence of the cancer, accuracy and safety of the screening tests, its effectiveness in reducing incidence and mortality rates, feasibility of implementation of a screening programme, capacity of the healthcare system with respect to resources, manpower and infrastructure and public acceptance of the programme. The overriding concern is whether the screening programme does more good than harm to society. Based on the above principles, over the years, the Government acts upon the recommendations from CEWG and has launched the Cervical Screening Programme (CSP) as well as the Colorectal Cancer Screening Programme (CRCSP) (Box 2). The CEWG will continue to review the

scientific evidence on the effectiveness and efficacy of screening on cancer and make recommendations on cancer screening in Hong Kong.

Other than screening, early recognition of warning signs and symptoms for cancer allows early diagnosis and has a significant impact on treatment outcomes. Although certain cancers (such as liver cancer) may have no or subtle symptoms in its early stages of development, in many cases it is possible to notice symptoms or unusual lesions early. Along with the general signs and symptoms of cancer such as unexplained weight loss, fever, fatigue or pain, one should watch out for unusual bleeding or discharge, change in bowel habits or bladder function, mass or lumps in any parts of body especially the breasts, nagging cough or chronic hoarseness, sores that do not heal, any skin changes e.g. change in an existing wart or mole, persistent indigestion or difficulty in swallowing. Although these symptoms do not necessarily mean the presence of cancer as they can also be caused by benign tumors or other medical problems, anyone with these symptoms or changes in health should see a doctor for proper investigation and diagnosis.

### Box 2: Cancer screening programme in Hong Kong



Women aged 25 to 64 who ever had sexual experience are recommended to have cervical cancer screening by cytology every three years after two consecutive normal annual smears. Screening may be discontinued in women aged 65 or above if three previous consecutive smears within ten years are normal. Women at or above 65 years of age who have never had a cervical smear should have the test. For more information about the CSP, please visit <https://www.cervicalscreening.gov.hk/>.



Individuals aged between 50 and 75 are recommended to have colorectal cancer screening by biennial faecal immunochemical test (FIT, a newer version of faecal occult blood test). For more information about the CRCSP, please visit <https://www.colonscreen.gov.hk/en/public/index.html>.



## The Government is committed to reduce the disease burden of cancer in Hong Kong

To address the disease burden of cancer, the Government set up the Cancer Coordinating Committee (CCC) in 2001 under the chairmanship of the Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food with membership comprising cancer experts and doctors from the public and private sectors, academics and public health professionals to advice the formulation of strategies on cancer prevention and control, and steer the direction of work covering prevention and screening, treatment, surveillance and research. To step up the prevention and control of cancer and the support for cancer patients and their carers, the Government launched the Hong Kong Cancer Strategy (Cancer Strategy) in July 2019.<sup>7</sup> It is the first holistic plan for cancer prevention and control in Hong Kong with a vision to reduce cancer burden in the local population, improve quality of life and survivorship of cancer patients. The Cancer Strategy is available at Food and Health Bureau's website at [https://www.fhb.gov.hk/en/press\\_and\\_publications/otherinfo/190700\\_hkcs/index.html](https://www.fhb.gov.hk/en/press_and_publications/otherinfo/190700_hkcs/index.html).

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## Data Brief

### Five Most Common Cancers by Gender in 2017

Rank	Male		Female		Both Sexes	
	Site	Number of new cases (%*)	Site	Number of new cases (%*)	Site	Number of new cases (%*)
1	Colorectum	3 303 (19.6%)	Breast	4 373 (27.0%)	Colorectum	5 635 (17.0%)
2	Lung	3 247 (19.2%)	Colorectum	2 332 (14.4%)	Lung	5 178 (15.7%)
3	Prostate	2 240 (13.3%)	Lung	1 931 (11.9%)	Breast	4 391 (13.3%)
4	Liver	1 408 (8.3%)	Corpus uteri	1 076 (6.6%)	Prostate	2 240 (6.8%)
5	Stomach	762 (4.5%)	Thyroid	703 (4.3%)	Liver	1 834 (5.5%)
	Other sites	5 916 (35.1%)	Other sites	5 784 (35.7%)	Other sites	13 797 (41.7%)
	All sites	16 876 (100.0%)	All sites	16 199 (100.0%)	All sites	33 075 (100.0%)

Notes: \* percentage among all new cancer cases.

Add-up may not equal to total due to rounding

Source: Hong Kong Cancer Registry, Hospital Authority

**Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD) WATCH** is dedicated to promote public's awareness of and disseminate health information about non-communicable diseases and related issues, and the importance of their prevention and control. It is also an indication of our commitments in responsive risk communication and to address the growing non-communicable disease threats to the health of our community. The Editorial Board welcomes your views and comments. Please send all comments and/or questions to [so\\_dp3@dh.gov.hk](mailto:so_dp3@dh.gov.hk).

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