



Learn the facts about prostate cancer

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Making an informed decision about prostate cancer is vital in the winning the battle against cancer. The Cancer Prevention Division of the Alabama Department of Public Health encourages men, as well as their family members, to learn the facts about prostate cancer. September is recognized as Prostate Cancer Awareness Month.

The diagnosis of prostate cancer is not always a death sentence, especially when detected early. State Health Officer, Dr. Donald E. Williamson, says, "Several issues, such as impotence and sex drive, are misunderstood in relation to prostate cancer. As a result, many men avoid seeing a doctor, discussing the disease and learning about their options for treatment."

The American Cancer Society and the American Urological Society recommend that men have a PSA test and digital rectal exam performed every year, beginning at age 50. Men in high-risk groups such as African Americans and those with a family history of prostate cancer should have these tests beginning at age 45.

In its earliest stage, a man may not show any signs or symptoms of the disease. However, American Cancer Society guidelines state that certain signs and symptoms may be noticeable as the cancer progresses, including:

- Difficulty starting or stopping urination
- Weak or interrupted flow of urine
- Increased frequency of urination (especially at night)
- Difficulty in having an erection
- Painful ejaculation
- Blood in the urine or semen
- Pain in the lower back, hips, pelvis or upper thigh

Certain risk factors may put some men at increased risk. Ninety-one percent of cases are diagnosed in men over age 55. African American men are more likely to be stricken with prostate cancer than are men of other ethnic groups. In addition, 5 to 10 percent of prostate cancers may be associated with family history, such as a father, grandfather or brother who has been diagnosed with the disease. Research also indicates that eating a diet high in fat increases a man's risk of getting prostate cancer.

Prostate cancer is the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths among men in Alabama. According to the American Cancer Society, 4,700 new cases of prostate cancer are expected to occur in Alabama in 2003, and 600 men are estimated to die from the disease.

According to the Alabama Statewide Cancer Registry less than 1 percent of cases of prostate cancer are reported with Stage 0 of the disease. Approximately 75 percent are reported with localized prostate cancer (invasive cancer confined to the prostate). Less than 2 percent have regional extension, 5.5 percent have distant disease at the time of diagnosis and 11 percent are unstaged (not enough information to assign a stage). Patients diagnosed with local or regional stage prostate cancer have a 100 percent five-year survival. The survival rate for all stages combined has increased to 97 percent.

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****Note to media.*** *Several hospitals and clinics across the state offer free or reduced rate screenings for prostate cancer during the month of September. Please check with your area medical facilities to notify the public about those that are offering screenings.*

TV Stations: If you would like a copy of a news package that contains an interview with a prostate cancer survivor and Dr. Donald Williamson, please contact Sandra Blakely, Video Communications Division, (334) 206-5618, e-mail alphtn@adph.state.al.us.