

Cancer Facts & Stats – 2nd 2020 – by Cassandra Laurie

Title: Anal cancer epidemiology and prevention

Anal cancer is a rare cancer, affecting women slightly more than men. While rare, the incidence of anal cancer is increasing. In Canada, 480 cases were diagnosed in 2013 and 595 cases in 2017.¹ Human papillomavirus (HPV) is an important risk factor associated with anal cancer. Around 90% of anal cancers can be attributed to infection with high-risk HPV infection.² Thus, HPV and HPV-associated lesions are key targets for prevention and screening of anal cancer. Primary prevention of HPV is available through a prophylactic HPV vaccine protecting against 9 HPV types.³ As for secondary prevention, it is currently unknown whether screening for anal pre-cancer leads to a benefit;⁴ however, several studies are underway to address this. In Canada, the HPV Screening and Vaccine Evaluation (HPV-SAVE) study⁴ recruits HIV-infected men who have sex with men, a population at greater risk of HPV infection. The researchers aim to evaluate the potential benefit of screening and treatment for anal HPV and anal pre-cancers. Behavioural changes are also needed. In order to reduce anal HPV infection and thereby anal cancer risk, safe sex practices, such as avoiding anal intercourse, practicing monogamy, and condom use are encouraged. These practices are summarized as the ABC approach: A is for Abstinence; B is for Be faithful; and C is for Condom use.⁵ Future results from the HPV-SAVE study will inform screening and treatment practices in Canada. Until these results are available, HPV vaccination and personal decisions regarding sexual behaviour may reduce the risk of human papillomavirus infection and HPV-associated lesions and cancers.

References

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