

# EDUCATOR RESOURCES



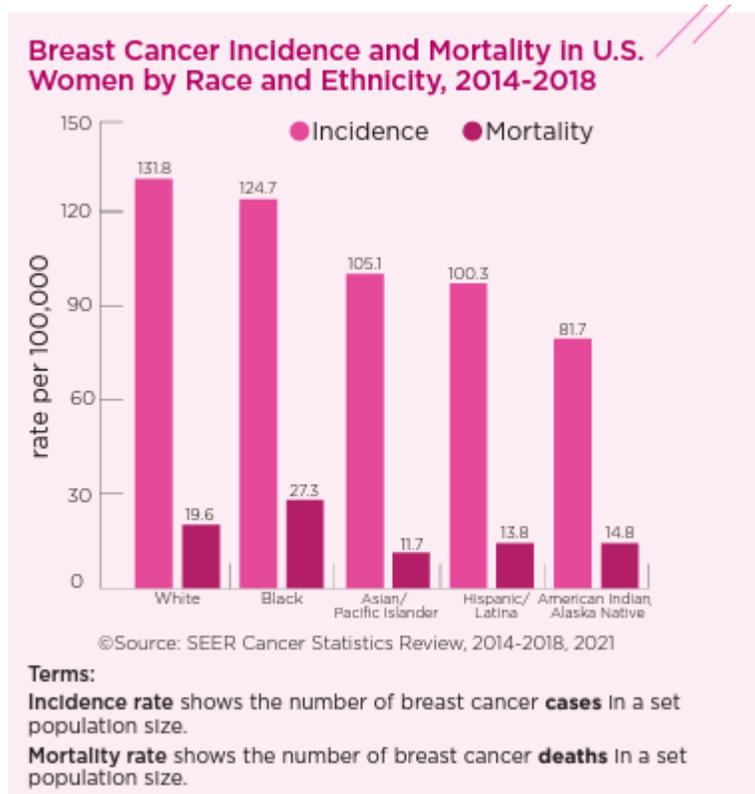
## Breast Cancer Among Black and African American Women

### ***Incidence and Mortality***

Studies show that Black and African American women have slightly lower breast cancer incidence rates compared to white women (see table below)<sup>1</sup>. However, among younger women (less than 40 years), incidence rates are higher among Blacks and African Americans than whites<sup>2</sup>. Breast cancer is the leading cause of cancer death among Black and African American women in the U.S.<sup>1</sup>. Black and African American women also have a lower 5-year relative survival rate as compared to white women<sup>2</sup>. This difference in mortality is not yet well understood, but could be attributed to a later stage at diagnosis, poorer stage-specific survival and higher rates of aggressive, triple negative breast cancer among Black and African American women<sup>2</sup>.

Breast cancer incidence rates among Black and African American women increased rapidly during the 1980s, largely because of increases in mammography screening<sup>13</sup>. From 2014-2018, the overall incidence rate was stable, but the trends vary by race and age<sup>2</sup>.

Breast cancer mortality is about 40 percent higher in Black and African American women than in white women in the U.S. despite a slightly lower incidence rate<sup>3</sup>.



## Five-Year Relative Survival Rates

Relative survival compares survival rates between women with breast cancer to women in the general population. In general, the 5-year relative survival for Black and African American women diagnosed with breast cancer is 82 percent<sup>1</sup>. This means Black and African American women diagnosed with breast cancer are, on average, 82 percent as likely as Black and African American women in the general population to live five years beyond their diagnosis. These rates are averages and vary depending on a person’s diagnosis and treatment.

## Relative Survival Rates by Stage at Diagnosis

When talking about breast cancer survival rates, it is important to understand that 5-year relative survival rates vary depending on the stage at diagnosis. Breast cancer staging is very complex. The stage of the cancer is determined by the size of the tumor, whether it has spread to lymph nodes and whether it has spread to other parts of the body. For instance, ductal carcinoma in situ (also called DCIS) refers to the stage in which the cancer is contained within the milk duct. It is considered non-invasive as it has not yet spread outside of the duct. Please remember, each cancer is unique and each individual diagnosed with cancer should ask her/his doctor to help determine her/his prognosis (likely outcome).

Stage at Diagnosis	Percent 5-Year Relative Survival Rate <sup>3</sup>	
	Black and African American	Non-Hispanic White
In Situ	100	100
Localized	96	99
Regional	78	86
Distant	19	29

## Screening Habits

In the past, African American women were less likely than white women to get regular mammograms<sup>4</sup>. Lower screening rates in the past may be one possible reason for the difference in survival rates today.

Black women now have slightly higher rates of mammography use than other women<sup>6</sup>. In 2015 (most recent data available), among women 40 and older, 69 percent of black women had a mammogram in the past 2 years<sup>6</sup>.

There is some evidence that Black recent immigrants (living in the U.S. for less than 10 years) have a lower rate of annual mammography screening than do U.S.-born African Americans and whites. This is likely a result of factors related to lower health care utilization, due in part to a lack of health insurance among the Black immigrant population<sup>8</sup>.



For more information about DCIS, see [\*Facts for Life: Ductal Carcinoma in Situ.\*](#)

	Percentage of women 40 and older who had a mammogram in the past 2 years <sup>6</sup> .
Black	74%
White	73%
Hispanic	71%
American Indian/Alaska Native	66%
Asian	71%
Adapted from American Cancer Society materials.	

## ***Triple Negative Breast Cancer***

Triple negative breast cancer (TNBC) tumors tend to occur more often in younger women and Black and African American women<sup>1</sup>. These tumors test negative for three receptors including Estrogen (ER-), Progesterone (PR-) and Human Epidermal Growth Factor 2/neu-negative (HER2-). Triple negative tumors are often aggressive and have a poorer prognosis than ER-positive breast cancers (at least within the first 5 years after diagnosis), however, after about 5 years, this difference begins to decrease and eventually goes away<sup>5</sup>. This is largely due to the lack of specific therapies to treat the tumor, though many cases of TNBC are effectively treated with chemotherapy<sup>5</sup>.

Some studies suggest black women are more likely to be diagnosed with triple negative breast cancer as a result of African ancestry, while others find the cause to be related more to certain behavioral risk factors, such as reproductive patterns that are relatively more common in black women (including giving birth to more than one child, early age at first pregnancy and lower rates of breastfeeding)<sup>13</sup>.

Black women are twice as likely as women of other racial and ethnic groups in the US to be diagnosed with triple negative breast cancer<sup>13</sup>. Even though Black and African American women are at higher risk of TNBC, the percentage of Black and African American women diagnosed with this type of breast cancer is still relatively low as most breast cancers are diagnosed in white women.



For more information  
about triple negative  
breast cancer, see  
[\*Facts for Life: Triple  
Negative Breast Cancer.\*](#)

1. Cancer Facts & Figures 2022,” American Cancer Society (2022).
2. Breast Cancer Facts and Figures, 2020-2021. American Cancer Society.
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4. Smigal C, Jemal A, Ward E, et al. Trends in breast cancer by race and ethnicity: update 2006. *CA Cancer J Clin.* 56(3):168-83, 2006.
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13. Cancer Facts & Figures for African American/Black people 2022-2024,” American Cancer Society (2022).