

HIV & CANCER

People living with HIV (PLHIV) have a higher risk of some types of cancers than people who do not have HIV. This is thought to be due to several factors, including HIV’s effects on the immune system, higher rates of smoking amongst PLHIV, and infection with other viruses such as human papilloma virus (HPV) or hepatitis viruses. The best ways to lower the risk of getting cancer are regular exercise, healthy diet, and early detection and treatment. It is important for PLHIV to undergo regular cancer screening, as early detection dramatically improves the effectiveness of treatment.

If a person is diagnosed with cancer, it is important to look after oneself beyond getting treatment. Having strong support networks can help people cope in difficult times. Whether family, friends, or carers, these support networks can help the person cope with diagnosis, treatment, and

recovery. Looking after mental health during these stages is key, as a cancer diagnosis can worsen the depression and other issues PLHIV may experience. Speaking with a psychologist or joining a support group can help prevent and alleviate mental health issues.

While some cancers can be prevented, others are a consequence of a weakened immune system. These cancers are called **opportunistic illnesses**. The best way for a person with HIV to prevent or treat these cancers is to take and adhere to HIV treatments known as **anti-retroviral therapy** (ART) - please see *Factsheet 8: Medication Adherence* for more information.

The table below provides a summary of some of the more common cancers experienced by PLHIV, and different ways to prevent them.

TYPE OF CANCER	WHAT IS IT?	PREVENTION AND RESOURCES
Lymphoma	A cancer of the lymphatic system. The lymphatic system carries white blood cells around the body to fight infection.	Anti-retroviral therapy (ART) and regular health checkups.
Cervical cancer (women)	Human papilloma virus, the virus associated with warts, is known to be the main cause of cervical cancer in women. HPV is also a risk factor for throat and neck cancers.	Prevention of cervical cancer is possible with regular screening. PLHIV should discuss screening for this cancer with their doctor or nurse.
Anal cancer (women and men)	Human papilloma virus, the virus associated with warts, is known to be the main cause of anal cancer. Men and women with HIV are at higher risk for anal cancer than people who do not have HIV. In many cases, abnormalities may clear spontaneously, especially if the person is on ART. Smoking is also a risk factor for developing this cancer.	PLHIV should discuss screening for this cancer with their Doctor. In the future the HPV vaccine will help to prevent many such cancers. Quitting smoking will also help prevent these cancers developing.

TYPE OF CANCER	WHAT IS IT?	PREVENTION AND RESOURCES
Kaposi's Sarcoma	A cancer of the cells that line the lymph or blood vessels under the skin or in mucous membranes. It is related to infection with human herpes virus type 8 and HIV.	Anti-retroviral therapy (ART).
Lung cancer	A cancer that affects the lungs and PLHIV are at a greater risk of developing it.	<p>PLHIV who smoke can reduce dramatically their risk of lung cancer by quitting smoking. If the person you are caring for smokes, you can encourage them to speak to their doctor about nicotine replacement treatments or to attend a Quit Program.</p> <p>Living Positive Victoria runs Quit Programs tailored specifically for people living with HIV.</p> <p>http://www.livingpositivevictoria.org.au/programs/quit</p> <p>See Quitline, http://www.quit.org.au or call 13 78 48.</p>
Liver cancer	Hepatitis viruses cause inflammation of the liver and over time may lead to liver damage and liver cancer. In Australia, about 6 per cent of PLHIV have hepatitis B and around 12 per cent have hepatitis C. Higher rates of liver cancer in PLHIV are mostly related to more frequent infections with hepatitis viruses (B and/or C) and alcohol use.	<p>There is a vaccine to prevent hepatitis B.</p> <p>Effective treatments are available for hepatitis B and C. People can discuss with their doctor or health professional whether the treatment for hepatitis B or C virus is an option for them.</p> <p>Some medicines can be used to treat both hepatitis B virus and HIV, and there are treatments available that can cure hepatitis C.</p> <p>If a person knows they have previously been exposed to hepatitis B or C, reducing alcohol consumption is recommended.</p> <p>For useful resources on viral hepatitis, see the Hepatitis Victoria website, https://www.hepvic.org.au</p>