

# “Understanding Native American Cancer Data in Arizona”

## 6th Series Topic: Ovarian Cancer

You may have been seeing a considerable amount of information about prostate cancer, here is why:

Top 5 Arizona Cancer Mortality Sites for Native American Females, 2018-2022		
Rank	Cancer Site	Avg Annual # of Deaths
1	Female Breast	18
2	Liver and Intrahepatic Bile Duct	16
3	Colorectal	13
4	Pancreas	12
5	Ovarian	10

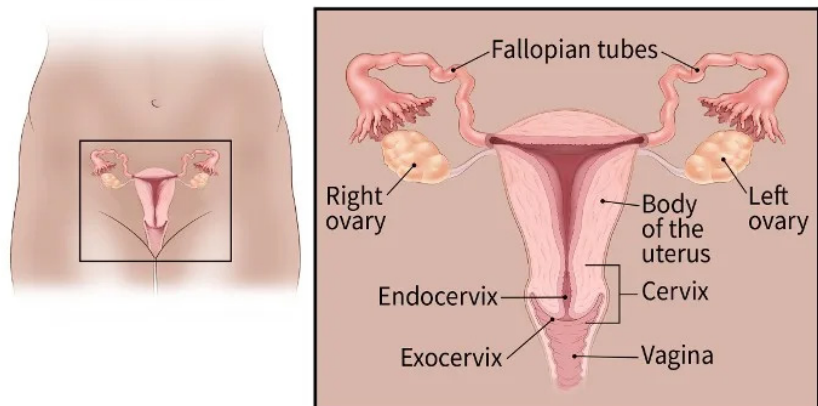
\*Data sourced from the Arizona Cancer Registry’s mortality data trends in Arizona’s Native American population from 2018-2022.

**Ovarian cancer is the fifth leading cause of cancer-related death** in Arizona Native American (NA) females. Nationally, from 2018-2022, there were **322 ovarian cancer-related deaths** among NA women. The lack of screening tests and the nonspecificity of symptoms result in later stage at diagnosis for both ovarian and uterine cancer. Therefore, it is imperative that NA females **understand their increased risk, take the proper precautions, and know the signs and symptoms to look out for.**

### What exactly is ovarian cancer?

#### Where are the ovaries located and what do they do?

- The **ovaries** are located between the hips on both sides of the uterus in the pelvis.
- The **oval-shaped glands** are attached to the uterus by muscles and ligaments.
- Ovaries are responsible for storing a woman’s eggs and secreting hormones, **estrogen** and **progesterone**, that control menstruation and pregnancy.



## What is ovarian cancer?

- Ovaries contain **three cell types**, which can develop into a tumor.
- Ovarian tumors can be **benign** (non-cancerous) and stay within the ovary, or **malignant** (cancerous), spreading to other areas of the body.
- The tumors that begin developing in the ovaries are **epithelial**, **germ cell**, and **stromal** tumors.
- The most common tumor type is **adenocarcinoma**, a type of epithelial ovarian cancer that grows on the outer surface of the ovaries.

Watch the Cleveland Clinic video that explains ovarian cancer in more depth [here!](#)

## What are the risk factors?

All women are at risk for developing ovarian cancer, but there are certain factors that can **increase your risk**.

Understanding how these factors apply to you might help you decide about ovarian cancer screening.

### Modifiable factors

- Diet
- Obesity
- Smoking
- Birth control (oral contraceptives)



### Unmodifiable factors

- Older age
- Previous cancer diagnosis
- Family history
- Endometriosis (abnormal tissue growth outside the uterus)



**Modifiable factors** can be changed or controlled, whereas **unmodifiable factors** cannot be.

## What are the signs and symptoms?

Not all ovarian cancers are detected at an early stage; only about 20% are found through regular women's health exams and screenings.

The **most common** and **early stage** of ovarian cancer symptoms include:

- Bloating
- Pelvic or abdominal pain
- Frequent urination or the feeling of urgency (feeling like you must go)
- Trouble eating or feeling full quick

**More serious symptoms** of ovarian cancer:

- Pain during sexual activities
- Back pain
- Constipation
- Changes in menstruation (heavier bleeding or irregular bleeding)
- Abdominal swelling with weight loss

Most of these symptoms are more likely to be caused by something other than ovarian cancer. Still, it's important to tell your healthcare provider if you have any of these symptoms so that the cause can be found and treated if needed.

## All that in mind...

If you have a family history of ovarian cancer or are experiencing symptoms, it is recommended to get screened earlier than later. It is important to be aware of one's risk of ovarian cancer and to know the signs and symptoms to look out for.

Moreover, it is pivotal for NA communities to know how to reduce their risk.

**Your health is sacred.  
Please learn the signs and symptoms to look out for and encourage your relatives to do the same!**