

[HIV and AIDS-Related Cancer - Introduction](#) [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 01/2016

ON THIS PAGE: You will find some basic information about these diseases and the parts of the body they may affect. This is the first page of Cancer.Net's Guide to HIV/AIDS-Related Cancer. To see other pages, use the menu. Think of that menu as a roadmap to this full guide.

About HIV/AIDS

Acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) is a disease of the immune system caused by infection with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). HIV is transmitted from person to person most commonly in blood and bodily secretions such as semen. A person with HIV is highly vulnerable to life-threatening conditions because HIV severely weakens the body's immune system. When HIV infection causes symptoms and specific disease syndromes, the disease is called AIDS.

About HIV/AIDS-related cancer

People with HIV/AIDS have a high risk of developing the following cancers:

- Kaposi sarcoma
- Non-Hodgkin lymphoma
- Cervical cancer

For people with HIV, these three cancers are often called “AIDS-defining conditions.” This means that if a person with an HIV infection has one of these cancers, it can signify the development of AIDS.

The connection between HIV/AIDS and certain cancers is not completely understood, but the link likely depends on a weakened immune system. Most types of cancer begin when healthy cells change and grow out of control, forming a mass called a tumor. A tumor can be cancerous or benign. A cancerous tumor is malignant, meaning it can grow and spread to other parts of the body. A benign tumor means the tumor can grow but will not spread. The types of cancer most common for people with HIV/AIDS are described in more detail below.

Kaposi sarcoma

Kaposi sarcoma is a type of skin cancer that has traditionally occurred in older men of Jewish or Mediterranean descent, young men in Africa, or people who have had organ transplantation. Today, Kaposi sarcoma is found most often in homosexual men with HIV/AIDS and is related to an infection with the human herpesvirus 8 (HHV-8). Kaposi sarcoma in people with HIV is often called epidemic Kaposi sarcoma.

HIV/AIDS-related Kaposi sarcoma causes lesions to arise in more than one area of the body, including the skin, lymph nodes, and organs such as the liver, spleen, lungs, and digestive tract. Learn more about [Kaposi sarcoma](#) [3].

Non-Hodgkin lymphoma

Non-Hodgkin lymphoma (NHL) is a cancer of the lymphatic system. Lymphoma begins when healthy cells in the lymphatic system change and grow out of control, which may form a tumor. The lymphatic system is made up of thin tubes that branch to all parts of the body. Its job is to fight infection. The lymphatic system carries lymph, a colorless fluid containing white blood cells called lymphocytes. Lymphocytes fight germs in the body. Groups of tiny, bean-shaped organs called lymph nodes are located throughout the body at different sites in the lymphatic system. Lymph nodes are found in clusters in the abdomen, groin, pelvis, underarms, and neck. Other parts of the lymphatic system include the spleen, which makes lymphocytes and filters blood; the thymus, an organ under the breastbone; and the tonsils, located in the throat.

There are many different [subtypes of NHL](#) [4]. The most common subtypes of NHL in people with advanced HIV/AIDS include:

- Primary central nervous system lymphoma, which affects the brain
- Spinal fluid, primary effusion lymphoma, which causes fluid to build up around the lungs or in the abdomen

- Intermediate and high-grade lymphoma

Recently, doctors have found that even patients with well-controlled HIV/AIDS can develop NHL. Learn more about [non-Hodgkin lymphoma](#) [5].

Cervical cancer

Cervical cancer starts in a woman's cervix, the lower, narrow part of the uterus. The uterus holds the growing fetus during pregnancy. The cervix connects the lower part of the uterus to the vagina and, with the vagina, forms the birth canal. Cervical cancer is also called cancer of the cervix.

Women with HIV/AIDS have a higher risk of developing cervical intraepithelial neoplasia (CIN), a precancerous growth of cells in the cervix that is associated with human papillomavirus (HPV) infection. High-grade CIN can turn into invasive cervical cancer. Learn more about [cervical cancer](#) [6].

Other types of cancer

Less commonly, people with HIV/AIDS may develop the following cancers:

- [Hodgkin lymphoma](#) [7]
- [Angiosarcoma](#) [8], which begins in the lining of the blood vessels
- [Anal cancer](#) [9]
- [Liver cancer](#) [10]
- [Mouth cancer and throat cancer](#) [11]
- [Lung cancer](#) [12]
- [Testicular cancer](#) [13]
- [Penile cancer](#) [14]

- [Colorectal cancer](#) [15]
- Types of [skin cancer](#) [16] including basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma, and [melanoma](#) [17].

Looking for More of an Introduction?

If you would like more of an introduction, explore these related items. Please note these links will take you to other sections on Cancer.Net:

- **ASCO Answers Fact Sheets:** Read [1-page fact sheets](#) [18] that offer an introduction to these types of cancer. These fact sheets are available as PDFs, so they are easy to print out.
- **Cancer.Net Patient Education Videos:** [View short videos](#) [19] led by ASCO experts in these types of cancer that provide basic information and areas of research.
- **Cancer.Net En Español:** Read about [these cancers in Spanish](#) [20]. Infórmase sobre [estos tipos del cáncer en español](#) [20].

The [next section in this guide is Statistics](#) [21]. It helps explain how many people are diagnosed with an HIV/AIDS-related cancer and general survival rates. Or, use the menu to choose another section to continue reading this guide.

Links

- [1] <http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/hiv-and-aids-related-cancer/introduction>
- [2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>
- [3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/31286>
- [4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/19210>
- [5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/31269>
- [6] <http://www.cancer.net/node/31319>
- [7] <http://www.cancer.net/node/31271>
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- [15] <http://www.cancer.net/node/31317>

[16] <http://www.cancer.net/node/31378>

[17] <http://www.cancer.net/node/31265>

[18] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us/about-asco/asco-patient-education-materials/asco-answers-fact-sheets>

[19] <http://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/videos>

[20] <http://www.cancer.net/es/tipos-de-c%C3%A1ncer>

[21] <http://www.cancer.net/node/18929>