

Area cancer death rate is average

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Despite its industrial base and myriad of environmental difficulties, the percentage of Niagara County residents dying of cancer is consistent with the rest of the state, according to a state Health Department report.

A total of 486 Niagara County residents died of cancer in its various forms between 1976 and 1979. The figure represents 2.1 cancer deaths per 1,000 people, which is identical to the statewide average.

In New York City, the rate was 2.2 per 1,000 deaths, ranging from Staten Island with 1.8 to Manhattan with 2.5.

In Erie County, there were 2.3 deaths per 1,000 residents.

Statewide, 37,000 residents die of cancer and 66,000 new cases of the disease are reported annually. Nearly 44 percent of those cancer deaths were recorded in New York City.

For Niagara County women, breast and colon cancer were the most prevalent, with cancer of the lungs and colon most common among men.

Health officials said the most alarming statistic in the cancer study — the first ever attempted by the agency — was a 12 percent increase in lung cancer among women statewide.

"While the number of lung cancer cases among men now appears to be remaining almost constant, the continuing rapid increase in lung cancer among women is extremely disturbing," state Health Commissioner David Axelrod said.

In a jarring indictment for smokers, Dr. Axelrod said many of the 8,049 deaths attributed to lung cancer statewide — including 119 in Niagara County — could be avoided.

"An estimated 7,000 of the state's 8,000 plus lung cancer deaths could be eliminated if people did not smoke cigarettes," Axelrod said.

The Health Department used 1980 census statistics, then compared the number of cancer cases and deaths reported annually between 1976 and 1979.

While the death rate in Niagara County reflected state averages, male residents here are reporting new cancer cases at slightly elevated levels.

In Niagara County, one new case per 251 men was reported annually, compared with one in 260 statewide.

On the other hand, new cases among Niagara County women were one per 280, compared to a higher rate of one in 273 statewide.