

HEALTH DEPARTMENT STUDY**Niagara County cancer rates in line with state**

NEW MAPS: *The state releases statistics and maps that show the incidence of three types of cancer in Niagara County is similar to statewide rates.*

Although the state Health Department's newly released cancer rates for Niagara County fall within the state averages, officials are finding it hard to say what impact those rates will have on county residents in the future.

"You also have to remember that most cancers take about 30 to 40 years to really surface," county Health Director David Wertman said. "The exposures that caused these cancers now happened in early 1950s or 1960s. From that, it would be hard to say what our impact is."

Wertman, along with other county health officials, were briefed on the cancer rates Thursday as the state

unveiled the first cancer maps showing a county-by-county breakdown of the state's three deadliest cancers.

High incidence of cancer would be those that are 30 percent more than the state average, according to the report. In all three categories — colorectal, lung and breast cancer — Niagara County falls within the range of between 20 percent less than and 20 percent more than state rates.

For colon and rectum cancer in women, the Niagara County and state rate is about the same at 39 per 100,000. For the same cancer in men, the state average is 55 per 100,000, and the Niagara County rate is 56, according to the cancer maps.

The statewide rate for lung and bronchus cancer in men is 75 per 100,000, compared to the Niagara County rate of 90. For women, the Niagara County rate is 47, compared to the state rate of 42.

Breast cancer for women has a state rate of 102, with Niagara County rated at 108 per 100,000, according to the reports.

The cancer maps ... are an impor-

tant first step to address cancer in Western New York," said Donald Distasio, chief operating officer of the American Cancer Society. "The maps help raise public awareness and point us in the right direction for further research that will enable us to find the answers we need to conquer this disease."

But the cancer report does not tell the whole story.

"That's why the state should redouble its efforts to promptly determine the distribution of cancer risks in each community," Distasio said.

The cancer society would be conducting its own assessment to identify areas in the state that require more intervention, programs and patient

services, Distasio said.

Wertman said rates for other cancers are expected to be released in two weeks.

"Everybody wants to look at it as toxic waste in their backyard," Wertman said. "The reality is the majority of cancer is caused by the individual ingesting something, i.e., bad food, alcohol or smoke."

Eventually, the information will be reduced to ZIP codes, giving local health agencies a better handle on whether cancer clusters exist or if there are any connections to the illnesses at that local level, Wertman said.

"We can start going after potential risks at a localized level," Wertman said.