Prostate cancer is the most common type of cancer diagnosed among males in Pennsylvania. The age-adjusted incidence rate for invasive prostate cancer increased dramatically between 1987 and 1997, probably due to more widespread use of a screening procedure (the prostate-specific antigen test). In 1997, there were 9,873 cases reported, compared to 4,954 in 1987—an increase of over 99 percent. The 1997 age-adjusted rate of 140.5 was nearly twice the 1987 rate of 73.9. Although the rate declined between 1993 and 1995, it increased in 1996 and 1997, and remains high.

Prostate cancer is the second most common cause of male cancer deaths in Pennsylvania. In 1998, there were 1,779 deaths due to prostate cancer among Pennsylvania residents. This resulted in an age-adjusted mortality rate of 21.4 per 100,000. In 1988, there were 1,651 deaths reported for an age-adjusted rate of 23.6. The annual age-adjusted mortality rates increased between 1988 and 1990 but have generally been on the decline since 1991. The 1998 rate was over 20 percent lower than the 1990 rate of 27.0—the highest recorded during the eleven-year period of 1988-1998.

The bar graph above shows that Pennsylvania’s age-adjusted incidence rates in 1997 for invasive prostate cancer among all residents and whites were similar or lower than the United States rates. Among blacks, however, the 1997 Pennsylvania age-adjusted incidence rate of 232.6 (per 100,000 1970 United States standard million population) was over 8 percent higher than the United States rate of 214.6.

The bar graph above shows that Pennsylvania’s age-adjusted mortality rates for prostate cancer were similar to the United States in 1997 among all deaths and for whites and blacks. Historically, all three Pennsylvania rates have been similar or slightly lower than corresponding United States rates. Rates for blacks were more than double the rates for whites. For example, in 1997, the state rate for blacks was 146 percent higher than the rate for whites.
ALL PROSTATE CANCER – In 1997, 84.1 percent of all prostate cancer cases were diagnosed at the local stage of the disease. For distant stage diagnoses, the percentage was 5.2. In situ diagnoses were made for only 0.2 percent of the cases while diagnoses of regional stages accounted for 10.5 percent of the 1997 prostate cancer cases reported to the Pennsylvania Cancer Registry.

WHITES – Nearly 85 percent of the prostate cancer cases recorded among Pennsylvania white males in 1997 were diagnosed during the local stage of the disease. Distant metastases accounted for 5.0 percent of the cases. In situ diagnoses occurred for only 0.2 percent in 1997. Over 10 percent were diagnosed at the regional stage.

BLACKS – Among blacks, percentages were slightly lower for local stage diagnoses but higher for distant stages in 1997, compared to white males. Almost 80 percent of prostate cancer cases in black male residents were diagnosed at the local stage. Over 7 percent were diagnosed at the distant stage of the disease. Regional stage diagnoses accounted for 13.2 percent of these cases. There were no in situ diagnoses among black males in 1997.

The American Cancer Society recommends both a prostate-specific antigen (PSA) blood test and digital rectal exam annually beginning at age 50 for men who have a life expectancy of at least 10 years and for younger men who are at high risk. The Pennsylvania Department of Health takes a neutral position on prostate cancer screening but encourages men to discuss the issue with their physician.

DIGITAL RECTAL EXAM – According to data from the 1998 statewide sample telephone survey conducted by the Pennsylvania Department of Health’s Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), 70 percent of Pennsylvania men aged 50 and older had ever had a digital rectal exam and 47 percent had such an exam in the previous year. There is a national year 2000 objective to increase the proportion of people aged 50 and older who have had a digital rectal exam in the past year to at least 40 percent. Pennsylvania’s 47 percent for males aged 50 and older in 1998 is already higher than the national objective for the year 2000.

PSA TEST – In the 1998 BRFSS survey, 52 percent of Pennsylvania men aged 50 and older said that they had ever had a prostate-specific antigen blood test to detect the presence of prostate cancer.

NOTES: This pamphlet was produced by the Bureau of Health Statistics, Pennsylvania Department of Health. The Bureau can be contacted by telephone (717-783-2548), FAX (717-772-3258) or in writing (555 Walnut St., 6th Floor, Harrisburg, PA 17101-1900). Website is at www.health.state.pa.us/stats/. The Department is an equal opportunity provider of grants, contracts, services, and employment. Call the Department toll free at 877-PA-HEALTH. All the age-adjusted rates that appear here were calculated by the direct method using the 1970 United States standard million population. United States incidence rates are based on data collected by the SEER (Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results) program of the National Cancer Institute from several cancer registries throughout the country which are considered to be reasonable representative subsets of the United States population.