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## About Vaginal Cancer

Get an overview of vaginal cancer and the latest key statistics in the US.

### Overview and Types

If you've been diagnosed with vaginal cancer or are worried about it, you likely have a lot of questions. Learning some basics is a good place to start.

- [What Is Vaginal Cancer?](#)

### Research and Statistics

See the latest estimates for new cases of vaginal cancer and deaths in the US and what research is currently being done.

- [Key Statistics for Vaginal Cancer](#)
- [What's New in Vaginal Cancer Research?](#)

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## What Is Vaginal Cancer?

Vaginal cancer starts in the vagina. There are many different types of vaginal cancer, but the most common is called squamous cell carcinoma. It starts in the lining of the vagina.

- [The vagina](#)



## [What Is Cancer?](#) <sup>1</sup>

Cancer starts when cells in the body begin to grow out of control. Cells in nearly any part of the body can become cancer cells. Learn more here.

## [Anatomy Gallery: Female Genitourinary System](#) <sup>2</sup>

Explore our 3D interactive tour of the female genitourinary system.

## **VAIN (vaginal pre-cancer)**

A pre-cancer is a condition where some cells look abnormal. These cell changes are not cancer, but could become cancer over time. *Vaginal intraepithelial neoplasia* or *VAIN* means that the changed cells are only found in the innermost surface layer of the vagina.

VAIN is more common in women who have had their uterus removed (hysterectomy) and in those who were treated for cervical cancer or pre-cancer in the past.

There are 3 types of VAIN: VAIN1, VAIN2, and VAIN3. VAIN3 is the closest to a true cancer. In the past, the term *dysplasia* was used instead of VAIN. The types of dysplasia were referred to as mild, moderate, and severe, based on how close it was to a true cancer. This term is used much less now.

Low-grade VAIN (VAIN1) will sometimes go away on its own, but VAIN can sometimes lead to cancer if not treated. Higher-grade VAIN (VAIN2 or VAIN3) is usually treated right away.

## **Types of vaginal cancer**

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cells of the vagina get pre-cancerous changes (VAIN). Then some of the pre-cancer cells turn into cancer cells. This process can take many years.

## Adenocarcinoma

Cancers that start in gland cells are called *adenocarcinomas*. About 1 out of 10 cases of vaginal cancer are adenocarcinomas.

The most common type of vaginal adenocarcinoma is found in women older than 50. Another type, called *clear cell adenocarcinoma*, is more common in young women who were exposed to diethylstilbestrol (DES) in utero (when they were in their mother's womb). See [Risk Factors for Vaginal Cancer](#)<sup>3</sup> for more information on DES and clear cell carcinoma.

## Very rare vaginal cancers

### Melanoma

Melanomas start in pigment-producing cells that give skin its color. These cancers usually are found on sun-exposed parts of the skin, but they can also form in the vagina or other internal organs. Fewer than 3 of every 100 cases of vaginal cancer are melanomas.

Melanoma tends to affect the lower or outer portion of the vagina. The tumors vary greatly in size, color, and growth pattern. More information on this can be found in [Melanoma Skin Cancer](#)<sup>4</sup>.

### Sarcoma

Sarcomas are cancers that start in the cells of bones, muscles, or connective tissue. Fewer than 3 out of every 100 cases of vaginal cancer are sarcomas. These cancers form deep in the wall of the vagina, not on its surface.

There are several types of sarcomas. [Rhabdomyosarcoma](#)<sup>5</sup> is the most common type of sarcoma that affects the vagina. It's most often found in children and is rare in adults. A sarcoma called *leiomyosarcoma* is seen more often in adults. It tends to occur in women older than 50.

## Cancers that spread to the vagina

Cancers that start in the vagina are much less common than cancers that start in other organs (such as the cervix, uterus, rectum, or bladder) and then spread to the vagina. These cancers are named after the place where they started.

If a cancer involves both the cervix and vagina, it is considered a [cervical cancer](#)<sup>6</sup>. Likewise, if the cancer involves both the vulva and the vagina, it's considered a [vulvar cancer](#)<sup>7</sup>.

## Hyperlinks

1. [www.cancer.org/cancer/understanding-cancer/what-is-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/understanding-cancer/what-is-cancer.html)
2. [www.cancer.org/cancer/understanding-cancer/anatomy-gallery/female-genitourinary-system.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/understanding-cancer/anatomy-gallery/female-genitourinary-system.html)
3. [www.cancer.org/cancer/types/vaginal-cancer/causes-risks-prevention/risk-factors.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/vaginal-cancer/causes-risks-prevention/risk-factors.html)
4. [www.cancer.org/cancer/types/melanoma-skin-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/melanoma-skin-cancer.html)
5. [www.cancer.org/cancer/types/rhabdomyosarcoma.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/rhabdomyosarcoma.html)
6. [www.cancer.org/cancer/types/cervical-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/cervical-cancer.html)
7. [www.cancer.org/cancer/types/vulvar-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/vulvar-cancer.html)
8. [www.cancer.org/cancer/types/vaginal-cancer/references.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/vaginal-cancer/references.html)

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[See all references for Vaginal Cancer](#)

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## Key Statistics for Vaginal Cancer

Vaginal cancer is rare. It accounts for 1% to 2% of cancers in the female genital tract, and a very small portion of cancers overall.

Vaginal cancer occurs mainly in older women. Women usually are around 69 years old when they are diagnosed; though some women will be younger and some will be older.

For survival statistics related to vaginal cancer, see [Survival Rates for Vaginal Cancer](#)<sup>1</sup>.

Visit the American Cancer Society's [Cancer Statistics Center](#)<sup>2</sup> for more key statistics.

### Hyperlinks

1. [www.cancer.org/cancer/types/vaginal-cancer/detection-diagnosis-staging/survival-rates.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/vaginal-cancer/detection-diagnosis-staging/survival-rates.html)
2. [cancerstatisticscenter.cancer.org/](http://cancerstatisticscenter.cancer.org/)

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## Targeted therapy

Current [targeted therapy](#)<sup>2</sup> for vaginal cancer finds and destroys cancer cells with

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## Hyperlinks

1. [www.cancer.org/cancer/types/vaginal-cancer/treating/immunotherapy.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/vaginal-cancer/treating/immunotherapy.html)
2. [www.cancer.org/cancer/types/vaginal-cancer/treating/targeted-therapy.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/vaginal-cancer/treating/targeted-therapy.html)
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6. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/immunotherapy.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/immunotherapy.html)
7. [www.cancer.org/cancer/types/vaginal-cancer/treating/surgery.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/vaginal-cancer/treating/surgery.html)
8. [www.cancer.org/cancer/diagnosis-staging/lymph-nodes-and-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/diagnosis-staging/lymph-nodes-and-cancer.html)
9. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/swelling/lymphedema.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/swelling/lymphedema.html)

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