

Cancer death rate down but 565,650 seen in 2008

By Will Dunham *Wed Feb 20, 2008*

(Reuters) The U.S. death rate from cancer has continued a steady decline that began in the early 1990s but it will still kill a projected 565,650 Americans this year, the American Cancer Society said on Wednesday.

The death rate from lung, colorectal, prostate, breast and other cancer types fell in 2005, the most recent year for which figures were available, but not as much as in 2003 and 2004, the group said. The actual number of cancer deaths rose.

The cancer death rate for men has fallen by 18.4 percent since peaking in 1990 and for women has fallen by 10.5 percent since peaking in 1991. Cancer is the No. 2 cause of death in the United States, behind heart disease.

The declines are driven by improved treatment and screening methods as well as progress toward prevention such as declining smoking rates, according to American Cancer Society researcher Ahmedin Jemal, who helped write the report.

The society estimated there will be 1,437,180 new cancer cases -- 745,180 in men and 692,000 in women -- in 2008 in the United States, as well as 565,650 cancer deaths -- 294,120 among men and 271,530 among women.

It said 559,312 people died of cancer in 2005, compared with 553,888 in 2004. The number of deaths rose even as the rate dropped because the U.S. population grew more than the death rate fell in 2005.

"The increase in the number of cancer deaths in 2005 after two years of historic declines should not obscure the fact that cancer death rates continue to drop, reflecting the enormous progress that has been made against cancer during the past 15 years," American Cancer Society Chief Executive Officer John Seffrin said in a statement.

An illustration of the slowing decline in the death rates can be seen in colorectal cancer.

The death rate from colorectal cancer fell by about 3 percent in 2005 from 2004, after falling by 6 percent in 2004 from 2003. Declines in death rates for lung and prostate cancer in men and breast cancer in women were also smaller in 2005 than in the prior two years. Lung cancer cases are falling in men and appear to be leveling off in women after rising for decades, the group said.

The overall death rate in 2005 was 184 cancer deaths per 100,000 people. The cancer death rate fell by about 1 percent in 2005 from 2004 after falling by about 2 percent in each of the previous two years, Jemal said.

Had the cancer death rates remained at the peak levels recorded in the early 1990s, an estimated 534,500 more Americans would have died since then, the group said.