

Anus Cancer

Information for people with cancer

This information should not be used to diagnose yourself or in place of a doctor's care.

The anus (or anal canal) is the tube that connects the rectum to the outside of the body. The anus controls the release of stool (poop) from your body.

Anus cancer is also called anal cancer or cancer of the anus.

Diagnosis and Staging

What are the signs and symptoms of anus cancer?

Anus cancer is not common. There are about 600 cases each year in Canada.

If you have early stage anus cancer, you may not have any symptoms.

Here are some symptoms of anus cancer:

- Bleeding from your anus. This may be the first sign of cancer.
- Having an itchy anus that does not go away
- Mucus coming out of your anus
- A change in your bowel movements (going poop)
- A sore on or near your anus
- Swollen lymph nodes in your groin or anal area.

If you have any signs or symptoms that you are worried about, please talk to your family doctor or nurse practitioner.

How is anus cancer diagnosed?

These are tests that may be used to diagnose anus cancer:

- **Physical examination:** your doctor will examine you. They will use their fingers to check your anus and rectum. This is called a digital rectal examination (DRE).

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- **Anoscopy or sigmoidoscopy:** A tube with a light is put into your anus to look inside the anal canal.
- **Biopsy of anal tissue:** a small bit of tissue is removed and examined by a pathologist to see if it is cancer.
- **Gynecological exam:** People with a vagina should have a gynecological exam with a pap smear to check for cervical cancer (cancer of the cervix). Anus cancer and cervical cancer are both related to HPV (human papillomavirus).
- **If your lymph nodes are swollen,** you may need other tests.

If any of these tests find anus cancer, you may need more tests to see if the cancer has spread. You may need imaging tests like CT scan, MRI or PET scan of your pelvis and abdomen area.

For more information on tests used to diagnose cancer, see our Recommended Websites - Screening and Diagnosis section: bccancer.bc.ca/our-services/services/library/recommended-websites/screening-and-diagnosis-websites

What are the types of anus cancer?

- **Squamous cell carcinoma:** the most common type of anus cancer. 90% (90 out of 100) of anus cancers are squamous cell carcinoma. They start in the cells that line the anus.
- Rare types of anus cancer include adenocarcinomas, basal cell carcinomas and melanomas.

What are the stages of anus cancer?

Staging describes the cancer. Staging is based on how much cancer is in the body, where it was first diagnosed, if the cancer has spread and where it has spread to.

A lower number in each category usually means a better prognosis (how well your treatment is expected to work and how long you are expected to live).

The stage of the cancer is used to plan your treatment.

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Anus cancer staging:

- **Stage 0:** Carcinoma in situ. This is early cancer and has not spread to any other areas.
- **Stage 1:** Tumour (cancer growth) is 2 cm or less.
- **Stage 2:** Tumour is between 2 cm and 5 cm.
- **Stage 3:** Tumour is more than 5 cm.
- **Stage 4:** Tumour is any size and has spread to nearby organ(s) such as the vagina, urethra, or bladder

For more information on staging, see our About Cancer page:

bccancer.bc.ca/health-info/types-of-cancer/about-cancer

Treatment

What is the treatment for anus cancer?

Cancer treatment may be different for each person. It depends on your particular cancer. Your treatment may be different from what is listed here.

Surgery

- A surgeon will take out the cancer if the tumour is small and there is no cancer in the sphincter (muscles that surround the opening of the anus and control the release of stool).

Radiation Therapy (high energy x-rays that kill or shrink cancer cells) and Systemic Therapy (chemotherapy)

- If the tumour is small but there is cancer in the sphincter, you may get radiation therapy alone or with systemic therapy.

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- For large tumours, you will get systemic therapy and radiation therapy together. This gives a good chance of a cure. However, side effects from this treatment are worse.
- For the largest tumours, tumours that are not responding to other treatments, or cancers that come back after treatment, you may need your entire rectum removed. This means you will not be able to have a bowel movement (go poop). You will have a permanent colostomy (stool is collected in a pouch that is attached outside your body to your stomach area).
- For more information about radiation therapy go to:
bccancer.bc.ca/our-services/treatments/radiation-therapy
- For more information about systemic therapy go to:
[bccancer.bc.ca/our-services/treatments/systemic-therapy-\(chemotherapy\)](http://bccancer.bc.ca/our-services/treatments/systemic-therapy-(chemotherapy))

What is the follow-up after treatment?

- Follow-up testing is based on your type of cancer.
- Guidelines for follow-up after treatment are on our website: <http://www.bccancer.bc.ca/health-professionals/clinical-resources/cancer-management-guidelines/gastrointestinal/anus#Follow-Up-anus>.
- These are guidelines written for your doctor, nurse practitioner or specialist. You can look at them to see what appointments and tests you might need after treatment.
- After treatment, you will return to the care of your family doctor or specialist for follow-up. If you do not have a family doctor, please talk to your BC Cancer health care team.
- You should have a rectal exam, anoscopy and an exam of the lymph nodes in your groin every 2-3 months for the first two years after your treatment. After that, you should have the same exams every 4-6 months for three more years.
- The BC Cancer Life after Cancer page has information on issues that cancer survivors may face: bccancer.bc.ca/lifeaftercancer

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More Information

What causes anus cancer and who gets it?

We do not know the cause of anus cancer.

These are some of the risk factors for this cancer. Not all of these risk factors may cause this cancer, but they may help the cancer start growing.

- Being over the age of 50.
- Having an HPV (human papillomavirus) infection
- History of cervical, vulvar or vaginal cancer
- Anal sex
- Having many sexual partners
- Infection with HIV (human immunodeficiency virus)
- Smoking
- Having Bowen's disease. This is a skin condition that causes rough, scaly patches of skin around the anus. If it is not treated, it can become cancer.

Statistics

Anus cancer is not common. There are about 600 cases each year in Canada.

We do not have specific statistics on anus cancer. Anus cancer is included in "All Other Cancers" on our statistics page: bccancer.bc.ca/health-info/disease-system-statistics/statistics-by-cancer-type

The number of women getting anus cancer each year is rising [See note below, Statistics].

Note: Available statistics do not have information about the inclusion of transgender and gender diverse participants. It is unknown how these statistics apply to transgender and gender diverse people. Patients are advised to speak with their primary care provider or specialists about their individual considerations and recommendations.

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Can I help prevent anus cancer?

- **Get regular sexual health screening.** Sexual health screening is important for people who are sexually active.
- **Get vaccinated against HPV (human papillomavirus).** It is best to get the HPV vaccine before becoming sexually active. However, people who are already sexually active may still benefit from the vaccine. There is more information on the Immunize BC website: immunizebc.ca/diseases-vaccinations/hpv
- **Practice safer sex** by using a new condom every time you have vaginal, anal or oral sex.
- **Stop smoking.** Do not smoke and try not to be around tobacco and cigarette smoke. Even if you have been using tobacco for many years, quitting now will lower your risk of getting cancer. Support is available to help you quit smoking.
 - Visit the BC Cancer Prevention page on Tobacco: bccancer.bc.ca/health-info/prevention/tobacco

Is there screening for anus cancer?

- Your anal canal should be checked once per year by a doctor or nurse practitioner.
- If you are at higher risk for anus cancer, you may need a test of cells scraped from your anus.

Where can I find more information?

- If you have questions about anus cancer, please talk to your health care team.
- Our librarians can help you find the information you need. Visit our Library page: bccancer.bc.ca/our-services/services/library



Provincial Health Services Authority

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- Managing Your Symptoms: www.bccancer.bc.ca/health-info/coping-with-cancer/managing-symptoms-side-effects
- BC Cancer Library Recommended Anus Cancer Websites (Anus Websites): bccancer.bc.ca/our-services/services/library/recommended-websites/types-of-cancer-websites
- Emotional Support: www.bccancer.bc.ca/health-info/coping-with-cancer/emotional-support