

# Victorian Cancer Registry

## Cancer Facts

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### Mesothelioma in Victoria

Mesothelioma is a cancer of the protective lining (the mesothelium) of the body cavities and internal organs. There are two main types - pleural mesothelioma in the chest (94% of total) and peritoneal mesothelioma in the abdomen (5%).

#### How common is mesothelioma?

In Victoria in 2013, 97 men and 34 women were diagnosed with mesothelioma. This cancer accounts for less than 1% of all cancer diagnoses.

Almost three-quarters of men diagnosed with mesothelioma are aged over 70 years (and half of these are over 80 years). Over half of women diagnosed are aged over 70 years, with 33% aged over 80 years.

#### What are the outcomes for persons with mesothelioma?

Mesothelioma caused the deaths of 139 Victorians in 2013 (111 men and 28 women).

There is currently no cure for mesothelioma and the progression of the disease is usually rapid. Less than half of those diagnosed survive for more than one year from diagnosis, and five-year survival is just 5%.

#### Trends in mesothelioma?

Overall the incidence rate of mesothelioma increased in Victoria from 1982 to the early 2000s, but, since that time, has decreased for men and stabilised for women (Figure 1).

Figure 2 shows trends in mesothelioma incidence rates for men aged 70-79 and over 80 years. The incidence rate for men aged 70-79 appears to have stopped increasing, and a similar pattern is seen for the much rarer diagnoses in younger men. Only in men aged over 80 years has incidence continued to increase at a similar rate since the early 1980s.

Similar trends are seen for women though rates across all age groups are much lower than for men.

Figure 3 (over page) shows the numbers of diagnoses of mesothelioma for Victorian men and women, by year. Whilst diagnoses increased four-fold between the early 1980s and their peak in the early 2000s, in recent years these appear to be stable, if not decreasing, for both men and women.

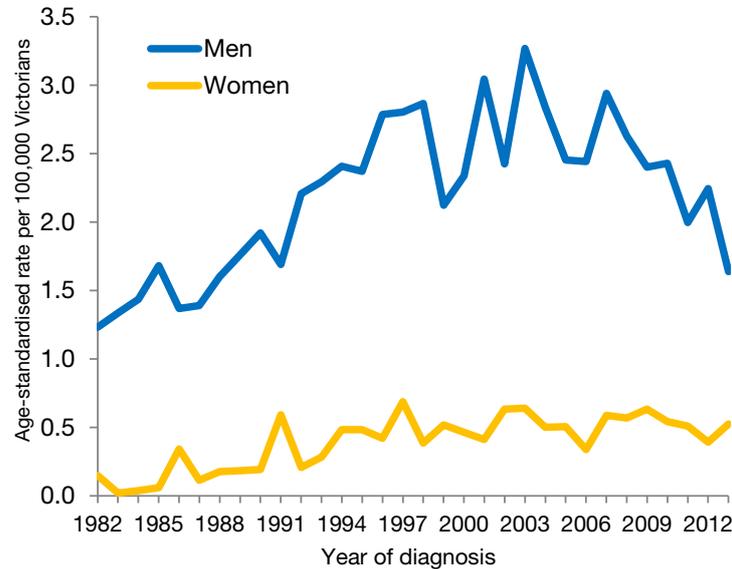


Figure 1: Trends in mesothelioma incidence rates

- Over 130 Victorians were diagnosed with mesothelioma in 2013
- Mesothelioma is five times more common in men than in women
- Incidence rates continue to increase in those aged over 80 years

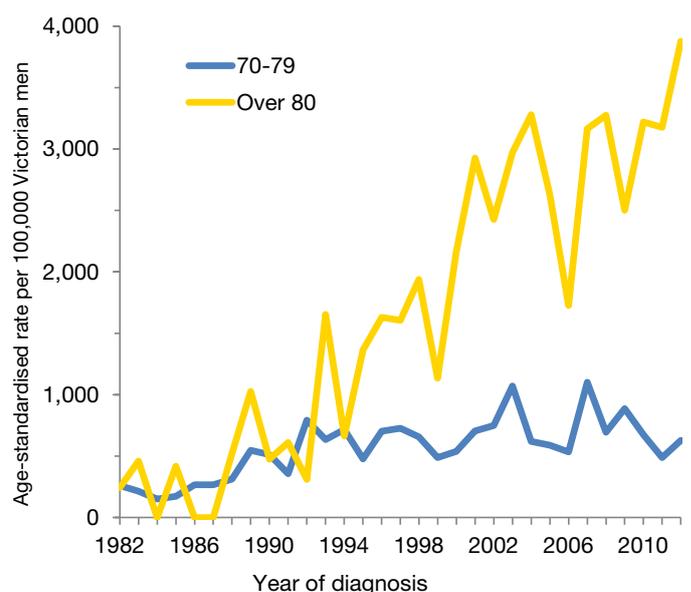


Figure 2: Trends in mesothelioma incidence rates for Victorian men for selected age groups

## What do we know about its causes?

Asbestos is the main cause of mesothelioma though more research is needed to better understand the relationship.

Mesothelioma symptoms do not usually appear until more than fifty years after exposure.

In the past, Australia was one of the biggest users of asbestos in the world and there is a large amount of asbestos in Australian buildings and other infrastructure. As a consequence, we have one of the world's highest rates of mesothelioma.

The use and importation of all forms of asbestos has been prohibited in Australia since 2004, and safety regulations are in place for workers in occupations that may still come into contact with asbestos-containing materials installed before this date.

The much lower incidence rate of mesothelioma for women are likely to reflect lower levels of exposure through their contact with men working in asbestos-handling occupations or their clothing, rather than direct contact.

The continued increase in incidence in elderly men is consistent with the long term effects to those who may have been occupationally exposed to asbestos in the years prior to its prohibition.

### References:

1. <http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/cancer-info/cancerstats/keyfacts/mesothelioma-key-facts/>
2. Australian Mesothelioma Registry. 2nd Annual Report: Mesothelioma in Australia 2012. Safe Work Australia and Comcare, Sydney Sept 2013

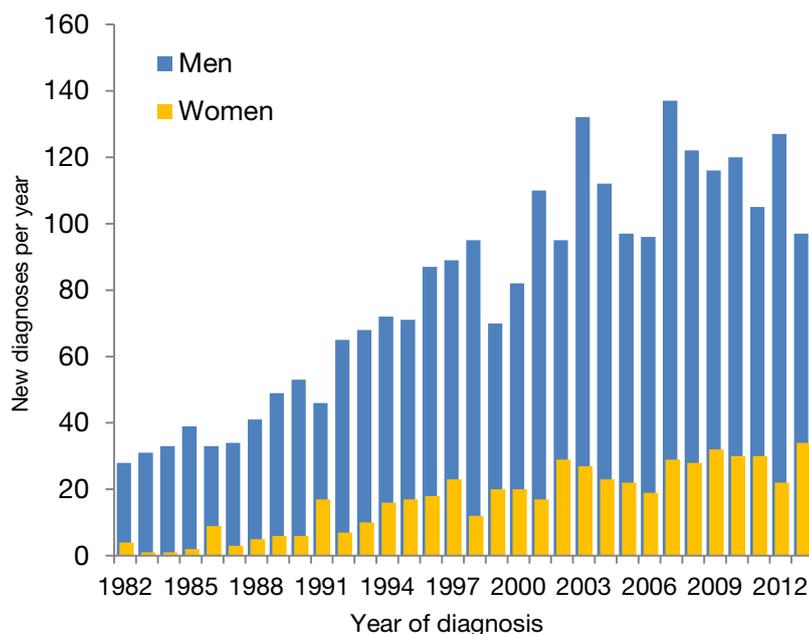


Figure 3: Diagnoses of mesothelioma by year for Victorian men and women.

## For more information about Victorian cancer statistics:

[www.cancervic.org.au/about-our-research/registry-statistics/statistics-data](http://www.cancervic.org.au/about-our-research/registry-statistics/statistics-data).

[www.cancervic.org.au/about-our-research/registry-statistics/cancer-in-victoria](http://www.cancervic.org.au/about-our-research/registry-statistics/cancer-in-victoria)

[www.cancervic.org.au/statistics/default.asp?ContainerId=search\\_cancer\\_statistics\\_in\\_region](http://www.cancervic.org.au/statistics/default.asp?ContainerId=search_cancer_statistics_in_region)

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