For several decades, lung cancer has been the most common cancer diagnosed and the leading cause of death from cancer in the world.

Because survival from lung cancer varies little by region, global patterns of lung cancer mortality mirror those of incidence.

Recent trends in lung cancer reflect historical patterns of tobacco smoking.

In men, incidence rates have peaked and are now falling in several highly developed countries, consistent with the initial adoption and subsequent decline in smoking some decades earlier. In most of those same countries, rates continue to rise among women as there has been no decline in smoking similar to that in men. However, in a few countries where smoking prevalence in women has been declining for several decades (notably in the USA), there are recent downward incidence trends.

Much of the burden could be prevented through tobacco control. Tobacco control policies (including increasing tobacco taxes and implementing smoke-free laws) are key to the prevention of lung cancer (see chapter 26 — Tobacco Control).

More than one third of all newly diagnosed cases of lung cancer occur in China.