

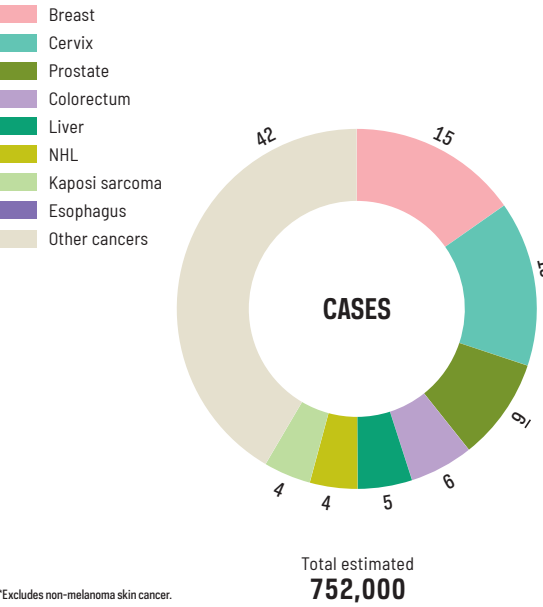
Regional Diversity

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Up to 50% of the cancers diagnosed in some countries in Eastern Africa are still related to infection, and these are largely preventable.

An estimated 752,000 new cancer cases (4% of the global total) and 506,000 cancer deaths occurred in sub-Saharan Africa in 2018. Although the overall cancer burden in the region is dominated by breast, cervical, and prostate cancers, the cancer profile in sub-Saharan Africa is quite diverse. [MAP 17.1](#)

**FIGURE 17.1**  
Estimated number\* of new cancer cases vs. deaths and distribution (%) by type, both sexes, 2018



The most common cancers in men are prostate (69,000 cases, or 23% of all cancers) and liver cancers (24,000 cases, or 8% of all cancers) as well as Kaposi sarcoma (20,000 cancers, 7%). Breast (115,000 cases, 25% of all cancers) and cervical cancers (112,000 cases, 24%) are the most frequently diagnosed cancers in women.

**FIGURE 17.1, 17.2**

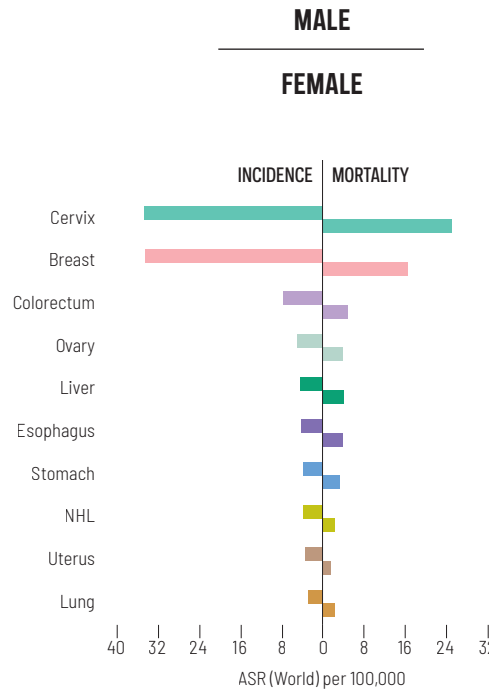
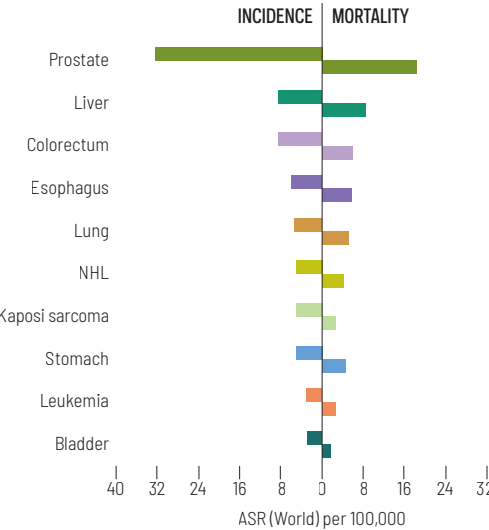
Incidence rates have been increasing for several major cancer sites. For example, cervical cancer rates increased by 80% in Zimbabwe and 36% in South Africa, although they have risen and declined recently in Uganda. **FIGURE 17.3** Major increases have been seen for breast as well as for prostate cancers where they have been measured, doubling in Zimbabwe (breast) and South Africa (both cancers) over the last 15 years. While the cause of elevated rates for certain cancers such as esophagus is still largely unknown, a westernization of lifestyle (e.g. dietary habits, fertility, excess body weight, and physical inactivity) has been related to observed increases in breast cancer, and is expected to give rise to increases in rates of other cancers such as colorectum. An improved awareness and increased capacity to perform prostatectomies on older men has been suggested to be linked to the increase in prostate cancer rates.

There is a large opportunity for cancer prevention and control programs to improve health outcomes in the region. Comparing incidence and mortality rates of all cancers combined across countries, large disparities in terms of incidence-to-mortality ratios are apparent. **FIGURE 17.4** Large differences between incidence and mortality

Sub-Saharan Africa has a unique mix of common cancers including several infection-related cancers.

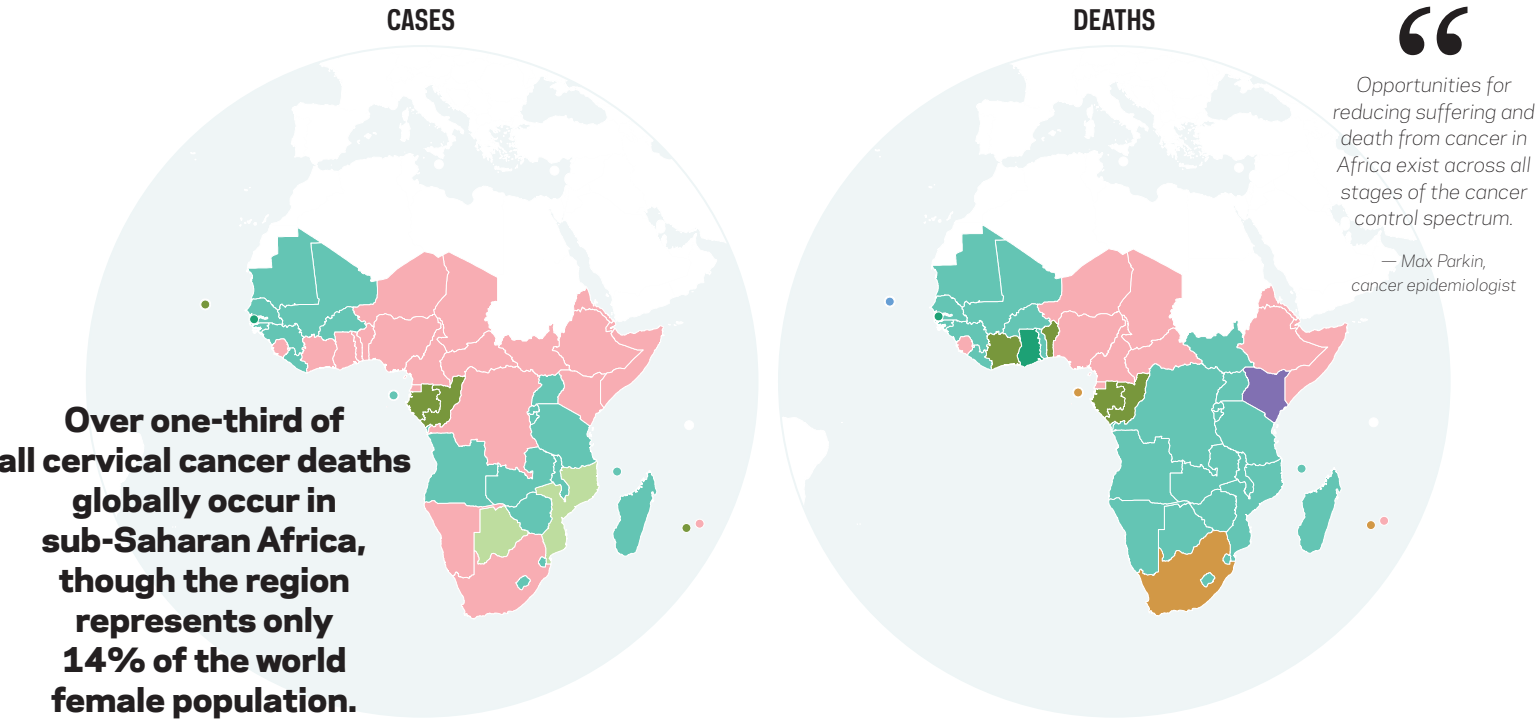
suggest poor outcomes and substantial case-fatality from cancers. Yet primary prevention remains key in sub-Saharan Africa, where there is a need to prioritize the most cost-effective means of reducing the cancer burden. Improved access to diagnosis and treatment, including palliative care, is also essential to improve survival and limit suffering from the disease in the region.

**FIGURE 17.2**  
Incidence and mortality rates of the most common cancers in sub-Saharan Africa in males and females, 2018

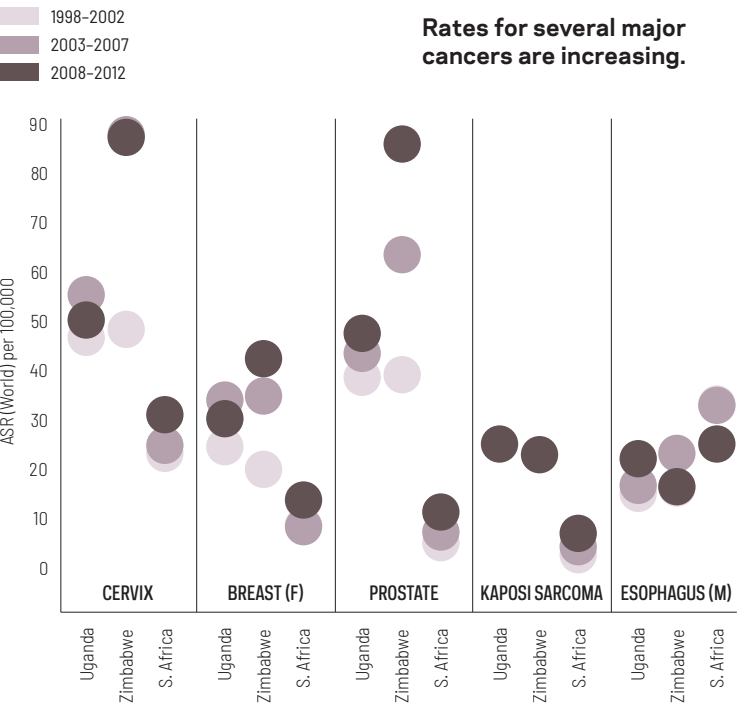


**MAP 17.1**

The most common cancer cases and deaths in sub-Saharan Africa, both sexes combined, 2018



**FIGURE 17.3**  
Trends in incidence rates in selected countries in sub-Saharan Africa



**FIGURE 17.4**  
Incidence and mortality rates in selected countries in sub-Saharan Africa, 2018

