

September is Prostate Health Awareness Month.

Prostate cancer is the most common cancer among men and the second most common cause of cancer-related deaths among American men. African-American men are more likely to get prostate cancer and twice as likely to die from the disease.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates screening tests and treatments for prostate cancer to ensure their safety and effectiveness.

Prostate cancer is frequently a very slow growing disease, often causing no symptoms until it is in an advanced stage. At that point, symptoms may include difficulty starting urination, weak or interrupted flow of urine, and frequent urination, especially at night.

However, these symptoms can have many other causes than prostate cancer, such as a benign enlarged prostate. If you have any concerns about any of these symptoms, you should contact your health care professional. Most men with prostate cancer die of other causes, and many never know that they have the disease. But once prostate cancer begins to grow quickly or spreads outside the prostate, it is dangerous. While the disease is rare before age 50, experts believe that most elderly men have traces of it.

One promising area of prostate cancer research is related to preventing overtreatment of patients with prostate cancer that is still localized to the prostate and who have a low risk of becoming symptomatic or dying from the condition. Careful selection of these men to ensure that they are low-risk is crucial. There is increasing evidence that close surveillance and repeated biopsies may safely allow these patients to delay definitive therapy (surgery or radiation). There is a need to reduce the burden to patients of overtreatment if the prostate cancer is slow growing.