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Cancer-related health behaviors and screening practices among Latinos: findings from a community and agricultural labor camp survey.

Winkleby MA, Snider J, Davis B, Jennings MG, Ahn DK.

Stanford Center for Research in Disease Prevention, Stanford University School of Medicine, Palo Alto, California 94304-1825, USA. winkleby@stanford.edu

OBJECTIVE: To examine whether cancer-related health behaviors and screening practices differ within a population of Latino adults, including those often missed by cancer surveys. DESIGN: Cross-sectional survey, conducted in 2000. Sample of 461 women and 356 men from the community (75% with unlisted telephones) and 188 men from agricultural labor camps, 18-64 years of age. SETTING: Monterey County, California. OUTCOMES: Six health behaviors and risk factors: obesity, poor nutrition, physical inactivity, high alcohol use, and smoking. Five health practices and screening tests used to detect cervical, breast, and colorectal cancer. RESULTS: Most respondents were born in Mexico, spoke Spanish, and had lived in the United States 10 years or more. In both surveys, more than 60% were overweight including more than 20% who were obese. Men, especially from labor camps, reported high dietary fat intake, low fruit intake, and high alcohol use. For every additional 5 years lived in the United States, the odds of obesity increased 25% for women, and the odds of high-fat/fast food intake and high alcohol use increased 35% and 50%, respectively for labor camp men. Screening rates for cervical and breast cancer were high and met Healthy People 2000 objectives. In contrast, screening rates for colorectal cancer were low; among those 50 and older, approximately 70%-80% of women and men from the community sample and 100% of men from the labor camp sample had never had a blood stool test. Unmarried women, in particular, had poor nutrition and low screening rates. CONCLUSIONS: Cancer control programs for Latinos need a particular focus on weight, nutrition, physical activity, alcohol, and colorectal screening.

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