

U.S. Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee has Pancreatic Cancer. Here's What to Know

Representative Sheila Jackson Lee will be “occasionally absent from Congress” as she undergoes pancreatic cancer treatment.

July 2, 2024 By Laura Schmidt

U.S. Representative Sheila Jackson Lee (D-Texas) shared that she has been diagnosed with [pancreatic cancer](#) and is undergoing [treatment](#), according to [The Associated Press](#).

Congresswomen Jackson Lee, who is seeking a 16th term, [issued a statement](#) announcing her cancer diagnosis, saying she is “currently undergoing treatment to battle this disease that impacts tens of thousands of Americans every year.”

Indeed, approximately 66,440 U.S. adults [will be diagnosed with pancreatic cancer](#) this year. What's more, rates of pancreatic cancer are rising faster among young women, especially Black women, compared with men of the same age, according to a study [published by Cedars-Sinai Cancer](#) researchers.

“I am confident that my doctors have developed the best possible plan to target my specific disease,” Jackson Lee, 74, said. “The road ahead will not be easy, but I stand in faith that God will strengthen me.”

She added that she will at times be absent from Congress due to treatment scheduling but reassured her constituents that she is committed to serving the American people.

The pancreas, an organ that sits behind the stomach, produces enzymes that are released into the intestines to help digest food. Cells within the pancreas (known as islets of Langerhans) produce the hormones insulin and glucagon, which control blood sugar levels. Most pancreatic begins in the cells that line the ducts of the pancreas and is known as pancreatic exocrine cancer. Less

common is cancer that forms in the hormone-producing cells or the neuroendocrine cells of the pancreas; this cancer is characterized by pancreatic neuroendocrine tumors and is known as pancreatic endocrine cancer.

[Early detection](#) and treatment of cancer increases the likelihood of long-term survival. Last year, the five-year survival rate for pancreatic cancer increased from 11% to 12%, extending the lives of about 640 U.S. adults, according to the [American Cancer Society's Facts & Figures 2023](#).

"Please keep me and my family in your prayers as you have always done. Know that you will remain in mine," Jackson Lee said.

To read more, click [#Pancreatic Cancer](#) or read Real Health's [Basics on Pancreatic Cancer](#). It reads in part:

What are the risk factors for pancreatic cancer?

About 25% of pancreatic cancers are related to tobacco smoking, with the risk rising with larger numbers of cigarettes and more years of smoking. About 15% of cases occur in people with a family history of pancreatic cancer. Obesity, certain genetic conditions, a history of chronic pancreatitis (inflammation of the pancreas) and heavy alcohol use (which can cause pancreatitis) also contribute to increased risk.

What are the symptoms of pancreatic cancer?

Cancer of the pancreas generally has no symptoms, making it difficult to detect at early stages, when it is easier to treat. Symptoms typically start once tumors have spread beyond the pancreas; these may include:

- Unexplained fatigue or weakness
- Pain in the upper abdomen
- Bloated or swollen abdomen
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Nausea or vomiting
- Loss of appetite
- Unexplained weight loss
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes)

- Fever or chills
- Dark urine or pale stools.

How is pancreatic cancer treated?

Treatment for cancer of the pancreas depends on how advanced the cancer is when it is detected, including the type of tumor, how many there are and how large they are and whether cancer has spread to nearby lymph nodes and other parts of the body, a process known as metastasis.

[Click here](#) for a list of approved medications used to treat pancreatic cancer.