

“Today” Cohost Al Roker Reveals He Has Prostate Cancer

The NBC anchor revealed his early-stage yet aggressive cancer diagnosis on air to encourage men, especially Black men, to get screened.

November 9, 2020 By Caroline Tien

Seventeen seconds into last Friday’s episode of NBC’s Today, cohost and weatherman [Al Roker revealed](#) that he’d been diagnosed with prostate cancer in September and will be undergoing surgery to remove his prostate later this month.

“It’s a good news/bad news kind of thing,” he told viewers. “The good news is we caught it early. Not great news is that it’s a little aggressive, so I’m going to be taking some time off to take care of this.”

After skin cancer, [prostate cancer](#) is the most common cancer in men. Those age 65 or over constitute 60% of cases, putting Roker, at 66, squarely in the danger zone.

Wearing a stoic expression, Roker said his cancer diagnosis was precipitated by the discovery of elevated blood levels of prostate-specific antigen (PSA), a protein produced by the prostate gland. It was subsequently confirmed by an MRI and a biopsy.

“Fortunately, his cancer appears somewhat limited or confined to the prostate, but because it’s more aggressive, we wanted to treat it, and after discussion regarding all of the different options—surgery, radiation, focal therapy—we settled on removing the prostate,” Roker’s oncologist, Vincent Laudone, MD, said in a brief appearance on the show.

Roker replaced Willard Scott as weatherman in 1996 and has been in the role ever since. In his nearly 25-year tenure on the show, he has reported from the scenes of several natural disasters, including the 2010 Haiti earthquake, and set the Guinness World Record for longest continuous weather forecast (34 hours).

Long before his own diagnosis, Roker campaigned extensively for increased awareness of prostate cancer risk among Black men. In 2013, he underwent a prostate exam on air, and in 2019, he joined forces with his Today cohost Craig Melvin and the New Jersey Devils hockey team to make a pun-filled [public service announcement](#) about the importance of “getting checked.”

In keeping with his record of advocacy, Roker was quick to deflect attention away from his own health and toward the inequities that plague medicine.

“I just decided that I wanted to go public with this because one in nine men are going to be diagnosed with prostate cancer in their lifetime, but for African-American men, that number is one in seven and is more deadly,” Roker said, attributing the racial disparity to “any number of reasons from genetics to access to health care.”

The fact that early-stage prostate cancer is asymptomatic, said another Today guest, Carol Brown, MD, highlights the importance of routine screenings such as Roker’s PSA test—especially for Black men, who are 50% more likely to be diagnosed with prostate cancer than white men and twice as likely to die of prostate cancer as white men.

To learn more about the benefits of a PSA test, [click here](#); to read about a Boston Globe reporter’s experience with the PSA test, [click here](#).

And to learn more about racial disparities in prostate cancer diagnosis and treatment, [click here](#) and [click here](#). To read about a Black urologist’s own experience with prostate cancer, see the Cancer Health cover story "[Turning the Tables](#)."

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