



HEALTH

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Women's cancers reach two million

By Helen Briggs

Health editor, BBC News website

Two million women were diagnosed with breast or cervical cancer last year, according to global figures.

A sharp rise in cases was seen in women under 50 in low-income nations, say US experts.

Women in richer countries fared better due in part to screening, medicines, anti-smoking policies and vaccines, they report in the Lancet.

The research backs calls for world leaders to make cancer prevention a priority in the developing world.

The new global statistics from hundreds of cancer registries worldwide found there were about 2 million new cases of breast and cervical cancer in 2010, and 625,000 deaths.

The analysis, by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington, Seattle, highlighted a sharp rise in breast and cervical cancer among younger women in developing countries.

Cancer charities and scientists are calling for these diseases to be given a similar global priority to maternal mortality.

In the past, complications during childbirth and pregnancy were among the leading causes of death in women of reproductive age in the developing world.

However, current trends suggest breast and cervical cancer deaths are starting to overtake, in poorer countries.

Study co-author, Dr Alan Lopez, of the University of Queensland, Australia, said: "We have poured an enormous amount of resources into addressing the serious concern of maternal mortality worldwide, and we've seen a great deal of progress.

"To expand that commitment, breast and cervical cancer need to become a standard part of the efforts aimed at saving more mothers' lives."

Mixed picture

The research in 187 countries for the period 1980-2010 highlighted stark differences in a woman's chances of

developing, and surviving, cancer.

In the UK, a woman's risk of dying from breast cancer has fallen from 1 in 32 in 1980, to 1 in 47 by 2010. In countries such as Rwanda, however, the trend has reversed, with 1 in 60 women now at risk, compared with 1 in 97 in 1980.

Dr Rafael Lozano, professor of global health at IHME, another co-author of the paper, said the world used to think of breast cancer as a problem for high-income countries but as the world has become more globalised, this is starting to change.

"The main known risk factors for breast cancer - poor diet and obesity - are now becoming more commonplace in poor countries," he said.

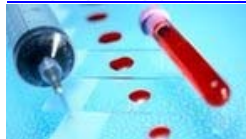
"We have found that while countries such as the United States and United Kingdom have been able to lower the risks of women dying from breast cancer, through better screening and treatment, countries with fewer resources are seeing the risks go up."

With cervical cancer, the number of cases and deaths are rising more slowly than breast cancer, he added, with the number of deaths from cervical cancer going down in high-income countries.

"Our concern is that this is a disease that is almost entirely preventable through safe sex practices and early detection, yet it continues to kill nearly a half a million women every year.

"With the right investments and targeted policies, like the ones we have seen in places such as the UK, we can reverse this trend."

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