

3 October 2016

## IARC marks Breast Cancer Awareness Month – overview of the disease

Breast cancer is by far the most commonly diagnosed cancer in women worldwide. An estimated 1.67 million women were diagnosed with breast cancer in 2012, which amounts to a quarter of all cancers diagnosed in women globally.

Despite huge strides made in treatment and care in recent years, breast cancer remains the most frequent cause of cancer mortality in many countries, particularly developing countries. Overall, breast cancer ranks as the fifth most common cause of death from cancer in women, with an estimated 522 000 deaths globally in 2012.

Risk factors for developing breast cancer are varied. They include age, family history, reproductive factors, and mammographic density. Alcohol consumption, use of combined estrogen–progestogen contraceptives, menopausal hormone therapy, and exposure to X-rays and gamma radiation are also known causes of breast cancer.

Although much remains to be understood about the causes of breast cancer, being aware of and avoiding the known risk factors can play a large role in preventing the disease.

To mark Breast Cancer Awareness Month 2016, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) is presenting a series of weekly reports, each illustrating important new research and findings about breast cancer prevention. Interviews with the scientists behind the research will be posted on the IARC website and Twitter account.