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Breast cancer cases and deaths are projected to rise globally

Lyon, France, 24 February 2025 – A new analysis by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) and collaborators evaluates the latest and future burden of female breast cancer globally, with a detailed analysis in about 50 countries with high-quality population-level cancer data. Published today in *Nature Medicine*,¹ the study finds that on average, 1 in 20 women worldwide will be diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime, and that if current rates continue, by 2050 there will be 3.2 million new breast cancer cases and 1.1 million breast cancer-related deaths per year, and the growth will disproportionately affect countries with a low Human Development Index (HDI).

These estimates are based on the IARC [Global Cancer Observatory](#), including data from *Cancer Incidence in Five Continents* and the World Health Organization (WHO) Mortality Database.

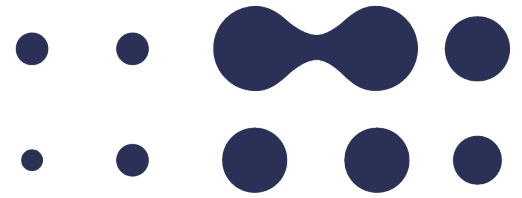
“Every minute, four women are diagnosed with breast cancer worldwide and one woman dies from the disease, and these statistics are worsening,” says IARC scientist Dr Joanne Kim, one of the authors of the report. “All stakeholders, particularly governments, can mitigate or reverse these trends by adopting primary prevention policies, such as WHO’s recommended ‘best buys’ for noncommunicable disease prevention, and by investing in early detection and treatment, supported by the WHO Global Breast Cancer Initiative, to save millions of lives in the coming decades.”

Overview of current global burden

Globally, breast cancer is the most common cancer type among women and the second most common cancer type overall. An estimated 2.3 million new breast cancer cases and 670 000 breast cancer-related deaths occurred worldwide in 2022. However, the burden of breast cancer is not evenly distributed across different world regions.

For example, breast cancer incidence rates were highest in Australia and New Zealand (~100 new breast cancers diagnosed per 100 000 women), followed by Northern America and Northern Europe, and lowest in South-Central Asia (~27 new diagnoses per 100 000 women), Middle Africa, and Eastern Africa. This pattern is linked to higher exposure to causes of breast cancer, such as higher alcohol intake or lower levels of physical activity, in countries with high HDI. In contrast, breast cancer mortality rates were highest in Melanesia (~27

¹ Kim J, Harper A, McCormack V, Sung H, Houssami N, Morgan E, et al. (2025). Global patterns and trends in breast cancer incidence and mortality across 185 countries. *Nat Med*. Published online 24 February 2025; <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41591-025-03502-3>



deaths per 100 000 women), Polynesia, and Western Africa, and lowest in Eastern Asia (~7 deaths per 100 000 women), Central America, and Northern America.

Assessing a country's breast cancer mortality rates alongside incidence rates provides an indirect measure of how fatal a breast cancer diagnosis is to women in different countries. The report showed that in countries with very high HDI, for every 100 women diagnosed with breast cancer, 17 die from the disease, whereas in countries with low HDI, more than half (56) die from it. The observed disparity is likely to be associated with inequities in early detection, timely diagnosis, and access to comprehensive breast cancer management.

This report also showed that based on 2022 rates, globally 1 in 20 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime, and 1 in 70 will die from the disease. However, there were large variations across countries and continents. For example, the lifetime risk of being diagnosed with breast cancer was highest in France (1 in 9) and Northern America (1 in 10), whereas the lifetime risk of dying from breast cancer was highest in Fiji (1 in 24) and Africa (1 in 47). In contrast, the lifetime risk of dying from breast cancer was 1 in 59 in France and 1 in 77 in Northern America.

Global burden by age group

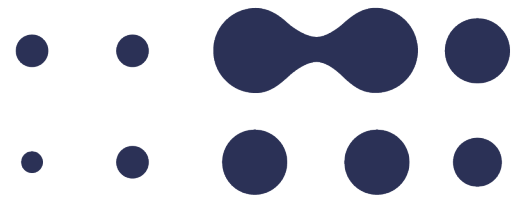
Globally, most breast cancer cases and deaths occur in individuals aged 50 years and older, who account for 71% of new cases and 79% of deaths. However, in Africa, nearly half (47%) of breast cancer cases are diagnosed in individuals younger than 50 years; this proportion is substantially higher than those in Northern America (18%), Europe (19%), and Oceania (22%). Although the proportion of breast cancer deaths that occur in individuals younger than 50 years is lower than that for incidence, it varies widely, ranging from 8% in Europe to 41% in Africa.

Trends in incidence and mortality rates

The researchers found that over the most recent 10-year period of historical data (2008–2017), breast cancer incidence rates increased by 1–5% per year in 27 of the 50 countries (mostly countries with very high HDI) with data that met the IARC *Cancer Incidence in Five Continents* quality criteria.

Importantly, breast cancer mortality rates decreased in 29 of the 46 countries (with very high HDI), based on the WHO Mortality Database. Only seven of these countries (e.g. Belgium and Denmark) achieved the WHO Global Breast Cancer Initiative goal of reducing breast cancer mortality rates by 2.5% per year. In addition, the study noted that breast cancer mortality rates were still increasing in seven countries, four of which had some of the lowest HDI across countries included in the analysis. This highlights the inequality in progress to decrease mortality from breast cancer globally.

“This report highlights the urgent need for high-quality cancer data and accurate records of the number of new diagnoses and outcomes in countries with low and medium HDI,” says Dr Isabelle Soerjomataram, Deputy Head of the Cancer Surveillance Branch at IARC. “Continued progress in early diagnosis and improved access



to treatment are essential to address the global gap in breast cancer and ensure that the goal of reducing suffering and death from breast cancer is achieved by all countries worldwide.”

Note to Editors:

In recognition of the major toll of premature breast cancer deaths globally and large deficits in breast cancer survival in many regions, the World Health Organization (WHO) launched the Global Breast Cancer Initiative in 2021. The Global Breast Cancer Initiative aims to achieve an average annual reduction of 2.5% in breast cancer mortality rates, which would avert 2.5 million deaths between 2020 and 2040. It provides a framework with three pillars of action using key performance indicators: (i) health promotion for early detection (> 60% of invasive cancers diagnosed at stage I or II), (ii) timely breast diagnosis (> 80% diagnosed within 2 months of first contact with the health system), and (iii) comprehensive breast cancer management (> 80% of patients completing treatment).

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