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Global burden of cancer attributable to infections in 2024: One in eight cancers worldwide linked to infections

Lyon, France, 28 September 2026 – A new study from the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) shows that an estimated 2.3 million new cancer cases worldwide in 2024 – about 12% of all new cancer cases – were caused by infections.

The analysis provides the most comprehensive and up-to-date picture of the cancer burden linked to infections. It includes additional infectious agents, such as HIV and Merkel cell polyomavirus, as well as newly established infection–cancer associations and additional cancer types caused by known carcinogenic infections, such as recent evidence linking Epstein–Barr virus (EBV) with gastric (stomach) cancer. The study, published today in *The Lancet Oncology*,¹ is based on cancer burden estimates from the IARC Global Cancer Observatory database.²

“The findings underscore the major role that infection control can play in reducing the global cancer burden,” says Dr Harriet Rumgay, a scientist in the Cancer Surveillance Branch at IARC and a co-author of the article. “Despite progress in vaccination and screening, infection-related cancers remain a major global challenge, with the burden falling disproportionately on populations in low- and middle-income countries.”

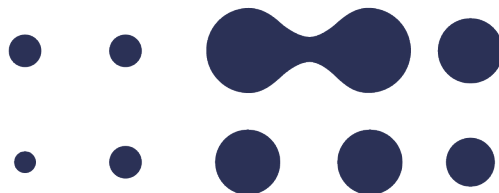
Findings

The researchers estimated new cancer cases attributable to 12 infectious agents known to cause cancer in humans, including viruses, a bacterium, and parasites. These 12 agents are *Helicobacter pylori*, human papillomavirus (HPV), hepatitis B virus (HBV), hepatitis C virus (HCV), EBV, Kaposi sarcoma-associated herpesvirus (KSHV), *Schistosoma haematobium*, human T-cell lymphotropic virus type 1 (HTLV-1), *Opisthorchis viverrini*, *Clonorchis sinensis*, Merkel cell polyomavirus, and HIV.

The greatest cancer burden was linked to *H. pylori*, which was responsible for an estimated 760 000 cancer cases in 2024, closely followed by HPV, with 750 000 cases. HBV accounted for about 360 000 cases, EBV for approximately 260 000 cases, and HCV for about 160 000 cases. Together, these five infectious agents account for almost all cancers caused by infections.

¹ Rumgay H, Georges D, Huang Y, Hirabayashi M, Shah R, de Martel C, et al. (2026). Global burden of cancer attributable to infections in 2024: a worldwide incidence analysis. *Lancet Oncol*. Published online 28 September 2026. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1470-2045\(26\)00307-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1470-2045(26)00307-4)

² Ervik M, Laversanne M, Lam F, Colombet M, Ferlay J, Filho AM, Bray F (2026). Global Cancer Observatory: Cancer Today (2024 estimates, version 1.0). Available from: <https://gco.iarc.who.int/today>.



The study also reveals striking geographical inequalities. Eastern Asia accounted for 42% of all infection-attributable cancers worldwide, largely driven by *H. pylori* and HBV. The burden was also particularly high in Sub-Saharan Africa, driven by HPV and KSHV and worsened by HIV. More than three quarters of infection-related cancers occurred in low- and middle-income countries, where access to prevention and treatment remains unequal.

EBV is the fourth largest infectious cause of cancer globally, ahead of HCV. This reflects growing evidence that EBV contributes not only to nasopharyngeal cancer and lymphomas but also to a proportion of gastric cancers.

“This updated analysis shows that the landscape of infection-related cancers continues to evolve as scientific evidence advances,” says Dr Gary Clifford, senior co-author of the study. “It also highlights where future investments in new prevention tools could have the greatest impact, particularly for infections such as EBV, for which effective vaccines are not yet available.”

Most infection-related cancers can already be prevented through well-established public health measures, including vaccination against HPV and HBV, testing and treatment for *H. pylori* and viral hepatitis, HIV prevention and care, and screening programmes for HPV-related cancers. However, these interventions remain underused in many parts of the world because of persistent financial, political, and health-system barriers.

Finally, the study highlights that reducing infection-related cancers will require both scaling up the implementation of proven prevention strategies and continued investment in new tools, particularly vaccines against EBV and other cancer-causing infections for which no effective preventive measures currently exist.

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The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) is part of the World Health Organization. Its mission is to coordinate and conduct research on the causes of human cancer, the mechanisms of carcinogenesis, and to develop scientific strategies for cancer control. The Agency is involved in both epidemiological and laboratory research and disseminates scientific information through publications, meetings, courses, and fellowships. If you wish your name to be removed from our press release emailing list, please write to com@iarc.who.int.