

LUNG, BOWEL, BREAST, UPPER GASTROINTESTINAL CANCER AND MELANOMA INCIDENCE AND SURVIVAL STATISTICS FOR NORTHERN IRELAND: 1993-2021

The Queen's University Northern Ireland Cancer Registry (NICR) today (Thursday 26th October 2023) released the official statistics on lung, bowel, breast, oesophageal, stomach cancer and melanoma diagnosed in Northern Ireland during 1993-2021.

This release provides details of the number of cancer cases diagnosed each year along with incidence rates over time and estimates of patient survival.

Key facts and figures are presented below.

Cancer diagnosis

- During 2017-2021 there was an average of 1,490 female breast cancer, 1,354 lung cancer, 1,216 colorectal cancer, 391 melanoma, 219 oesophageal cancer and 193 stomach cancer cases diagnosed each year.
- Most cancer types are more common among the elderly. Half of cases were diagnosed among those aged 73 and over for lung cancer and aged 72 and over for colorectal cancer. Melanoma and female breast cancer were slightly more common among younger people with half of cases diagnosed among those aged 64 and over, and 62 and over respectively.
- The odds of developing colorectal cancer before age 85 were 1 in 12 for men and 1 in 18 for women, while for lung cancer the odds were 1 in 11 for men and 1 in 14 for women. The odds of developing breast cancer were 1 in 8 for women.
- Lung cancer incidence rates were 68% higher in the most deprived areas compared to the NI average, while oesophageal and stomach cancer rates were 19% and 34% higher respectively. However, melanoma incidence rates were 15% higher in the least deprived areas than the NI average. There was no difference by socio-economic deprivation for female breast and colorectal cancer.
- During 2017-2021 the proportion of cancer patients diagnosed with late stage disease (stage IV) was: 46% for stomach cancer, 44% for lung cancer, 39% for oesophageal cancer, 22% for colorectal cancer, 5% for female breast cancer and 3% for melanoma.

- Over the last five years the average number of cases diagnosed per year increased by 9% for female breast cancer, 6% for lung cancer, 3% for colorectal cancer and melanoma and by 2% for oesophageal cancer. The number of cases of stomach cancer decreased by 11%.

Cancer survival

- Among cancer patients diagnosed during 2012-2016, five-year survival was 92% among melanoma patients, 83% among female breast cancer patients, 62% among colorectal cancer patients, 21% among stomach cancer patients, 19% among oesophageal cancer patients and 15% among lung cancer patients.
- Between 2007-2011 and 2012-2016 five-year survival from lung cancer increased from 11% to 15%. In addition there were significant improvements since 1997-2001 in five-year survival for colorectal cancer (52% to 62%), female breast cancer (76% to 83%), oesophageal cancer (11% to 19%) and stomach cancer (14% to 21%).
- Cancer survival varies considerably depending upon age at diagnosis. Five-year survival for patients diagnosed in 2012-2016 was as follows:
 - Colorectal cancer: 67% for 15-54 year olds, and 48% for 75+ year olds,
 - Female breast cancer: 90% for 15-54 year olds, and 69% for 75+ year olds,
 - Lung cancer: 24% for 15-54 year olds, and 8% for 75+ year olds,
 - Melanoma: 96% for 15-54 year olds, and 78% for 75+ year olds,
 - Oesophageal cancer: 20% for 15-54 year olds, and 12% for 75+ year olds,
 - Stomach cancer: 22% for 15-54 year olds, and 16% for 75+ year olds,
- However, stage at diagnosis remains the biggest factor in cancer survival. The contrast in five-year survival between early and late stage disease for patients diagnosed in 2012-2016 was as follows:
 - 8% for late stage colorectal cancer, compared to 94% for early stage,
 - 20% for late stage breast cancer, compared to 97% for early stage,
 - 2% for late stage lung cancer, compared to 52% for early stage,
 - 2% for late stage oesophageal cancer, compared to 64% for early stage,
 - 1% for late stage stomach cancer, compared to 79% for early stage,

Male breast cancer

- Statistics on male breast cancer have been produced separately and more extensively for the first time as part of this release. During 2012-2021 there was an average of 11 male breast cancer cases diagnosed each year, with 38% of cases among those aged 75 and over. Five-year survival from this cancer during 2007-2016 was 75%.

Impact of Covid-19 on cancer incidence and survival

- Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which began in 2020, further reports have been compiled detailing how incidence and survival from cancer has changed between April-December 2018-2019, 2020 and 2021 thereby providing an overview of the impact of the pandemic on cancer patients and cancer services in general.
- Compared to 2018-2019, the number of cases diagnosed in 2021 increased for all cancer types. There was:
 - a 17% increase in both colorectal and oesophageal cancer cases,
 - a 13% increase in stomach cancer cases,
 - a 9% increase in female breast cancer cases,
 - a 5% increase in melanoma cases and
 - a 2% increase in lung cancer cases.
- This represents a considerable recovery in the number of cases detected compared to the situation in 2020 which saw considerable declines in the number of cancer cases being diagnosed compared to 2018-19.
- However, for lung cancer the increase in later stage diagnosis identified in 2020 remained in 2021, with 48% of cases diagnosed at stage IV in 2021 compared to 47% in 2020 and 42% in 2018-2019.
- This is likely the cause of a reduction in the proportion of lung cancer patients receiving surgery (13% in 2018-19, 8% in 2020, 10% in 2021) and a reduction in one-year survival (41% in 2018-19, 35% in 2020, 37% in 2021).
- In addition reductions in the use of surgery to treat melanoma within a hospital inpatient setting, which had decreased between 2018-19 and 2020 from 77% to 57%, remained below 2018-19 levels at 60% in 2021.
- No other cancer type demonstrated increases in late stage diagnosis or reductions in treatment levels or patient survival between 2018-19 and 2021.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. All the statistics in this release are available at <http://www.qub.ac.uk/research-centres/nicr/CancerInformation/official-statistics/>
2. Legislation designating the Northern Ireland Cancer Registry (NICR) as an official producer of statistics came into place on 1st April 2012. Today's release of data adheres to the code of practice referenced in this legislation.
3. About the data:
 - a. New cases of cancer are registered from pathology reports, hospital administration records, and death certificates.
 - b. Registrations are validated and quality-checked according to internationally recognised standards.
 - c. Released statistics are not patient identifiable.
4. Incidence refers to the number of new cases of cancer diagnosed in a particular period of time and population.
5. Five-year survival refers to the proportion of people diagnosed with a cancer who are still alive five years later. Age-standardised net survival used here is a survival statistic that has been adjusted for background mortality and age profile between periods. Net survival is the theoretical survival of patients if they could die only from the cancer in question.
6. The data in this release was produced by:
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