Cancer Incidence and Prevalence in Scotland
(to December 2019)
A National Statistics release for Scotland
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About this release
This release by Public Health Scotland (PHS) provides an annual update of cancer incidence statistics in Scotland from January 1995 to December 2019. All cancer types are included.

Main points
- Over the last decade, the risk of developing cancer in Scotland fell by 5% in men but remained unchanged in women. The numbers of cancers increased in both sexes, from an overall total of over 30,600 in 2010 to more than 34,100 in 2019 – an increase of 11%. The increase in numbers reflects the increasing size of the older population.
- There were more cancers in females than males (around 17,300 vs 16,800) in 2019 but the risk of cancer was higher in males than females. The higher number in females is because females live longer than males and males and females get different types of cancer, in different proportions.
- In the last decade, there were increases in rates of several cancers including thyroid and liver.

10-year percentage change in age-adjusted incidence rate for 20 most common cancers in Scotland

- Lung cancer is the most common cancer (more than 5,500 registrations overall), although breast (around 4,900) and prostate (around 4,100) cancers are the most common in females and males, respectively. Bowel (colorectal) cancer is the fourth most common cancer (around 4,200 in 2019).
• Lung cancer is three times more common in the most deprived areas compared with the least deprived areas in Scotland. Cervical cancers are also more common in the more deprived areas. In contrast, female breast and prostate cancers are more common in the less deprived areas.

• The earlier a patient is diagnosed with cancer, the more likely they are to have a good outcome. Four out of five breast cancers (79%) were diagnosed at an early stage (I or II). In contrast, almost half of lung cancers (47%) and a fifth of colorectal cancers (20%) were diagnosed at a late stage (Stage IV).

• There was convincing evidence that socio-economic deprivation increased the likelihood of being diagnosed with more advanced cancers of the bladder, bowel (colorectum), cervix, female breast, head and neck, melanoma and prostate. For these cancers, patients were more likely to have cancers that had spread to other parts of the body (metastatic disease - stage IV) in the most deprived groups compared to the least deprived groups. Lower rates of cancer screening participation (for breast, bowel and cervical cancers) are one potential explanation.

Background

The Scottish Cancer Registry collects information on every cancer in Scotland and uses the data to inform cancer control. Cancer registrations are believed to be essentially complete for the year 2019, but it is important to note that the cancer registration database is dynamic. "All cancers" by convention exclude non-melanoma skin cancers.

About 40% of cancers are potentially preventable through behavioural and lifestyle changes. Smoking, obesity, alcohol and diet are among the largest modifiable risk factors for cancer in Scotland.

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Find out more

Data from this publication are available from the publication page on our website. Open data from this publication are available from the Scottish Health and Social Care Open Data platform.

The next release of this publication will be May 2022.

Other formats of this publication are available on request at: 0131 314 5300  
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