



Press release

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14 Health

Swiss Cancer Report 2021

Rise in number of cancer patients coincides with decline in mortality

The increasing number of older people has led to rising numbers of cancer patients and of deaths caused by cancer. At the same time, the overall incidence rate for cancer has decreased for men and has remained unchanged for women. The risk of dying from cancer has decreased in both men and women. These are some of the findings from the third Swiss Cancer Report 2021, which the Federal Statistical Office (FSO), the National Agency for Cancer Registration (NACR) and the Childhood Cancer Registry (NCCR) have jointly compiled. The report contains the latest available data on cancer in Switzerland for the period 2013-2017.

During the period from 2013 to 2017, the annual incidence rate was approximately 23 100 for men and 19 650 for women. It thus increased by around 3350 cases within five years in men and women combined. In 2021, around 42 000 new cancer diagnoses are expected: 26 000 in men and 22 000 in women. The main reason for this increase is demographic change with an increasing number of older people.

The risk of developing cancer is not the reason for the increase in cases as it remained virtually unchanged for women and even decreased slightly for men overall in the period from 2003 to 2017. The mean annual incidence rate has increased among boys and young men by 0.8% and among women by 1.4% in the last two decades. This may be due to a combination of improved registration, changes in diagnostic practice, random fluctuations due to low case numbers and real increases. Mortality rates have decreased among children and young people during the same period due to improved treatments.

Four types of cancer are predominant

In men, 50.3% of new cases each year are for prostate, lung and colon cancer while for women 51.1% are for breast, lung and colon cancer. The other types of cancer each account for less than 7% of new cases every year. Leukaemia, brain tumours and tumours from embryonic tissue are the most common cancers in children.

Every year around 17 000 persons die of cancer

Between 2013 and 2017, approx. 9400 men and 7650 women died from cancer per year. This means that in Switzerland, 30% of all male deaths and 23% of all female deaths were due to cancer. Among men, 21% of cancer deaths are caused by lung cancer, 14% by prostate cancer and 10% by colon cancer. Among women, breast cancer is responsible for 18% of cancer deaths, lung cancer for 16% and colon cancer for 10%. Leukaemia and brain tumours cause the most deaths among children. Overall, lung cancer is the most common cause of cancer death, with 3200 deaths per year.

The mortality rates for cancer declined during the period from 1988 to 2017 by 28% among women and by 39% among men. This means that in women today the risk of dying from cancer has fallen by almost one third compared with women of the same age 30 years ago. Among men, the mortality risk over the past three decades has even declined by far more than a third.

Chances of survival for many types of cancer are improving

During the period 2013–2017, the 5-year survival rate for all types of cancer and taking into account other causes of death was 64% for men and 67% for women. Compared with the period 2003–2007, this was an increase of 3 percentage points each for men and women. For children, the 5-year survival rate is now even greater than 85%. Chances of survival are influenced by the type of cancer and by access to medical treatment and its effectiveness.

Low morbidity and mortality rates in international comparison

Compared with nine European countries (including Switzerland's neighbouring countries and other Western European nations), the incidence rate in Switzerland for all tumour types together is low for both men and women. Switzerland's mortality rates are the second lowest for men and the lowest for women. In terms of 5-year survival rates, Switzerland is situated in the middle. For children and young people, the survival rates following cancer are comparable with those of the neighbouring countries.

Content, data sources and methods

The Swiss Cancer Report 2021 is commissioned by the Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH). The report contains key epidemiological figures on all cancers and on 24 individual cancer types: Numbers of new cases, numbers of deaths, mean survival time after diagnosis, potential years of life lost, the risk of developing the disease, as well as the number of people living in Switzerland with or following a cancer diagnosis. The report describes the current status based on data from 2013-2017, the development between 1988 and 2017 and estimates morbidity and mortality for 2021. The statistical data used in the report are taken from the regional and cantonal cancer registers which are combined by the National Agency for Cancer Registration (NACR), the Childhood Cancer Registry (NCCR) and surveys by the Federal Statistical Office (FSO). Comparative figures from international sources are presented for nine countries (Germany, France, Italy, Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Norway and Sweden) that are readily comparable with Switzerland in terms of development and data.

The main report on the status and developments is completed by a methodology report. This provides further information on the classifications used, data sources and data quality, definitions and calculation of the indicators and on the presentation of the key figures.

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Recent publications

Swiss Cancer Report 2021 (available in French and German),

FSO number: 1177-2100 (g) and 1178-2100 (f)

Publication orders: tel. +41 58 463 60 60, email: order@bfs.admin.ch

Online

Further information and publications: www.bfs.admin.ch/news/en/2021-0245

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Access to results

This press release has been established on the basis of the European Statistics Code of Practice, which ensures the independence, integrity and accountability of national and community statistical offices. Privileged access is supervised and under embargo.

The Institute of Social and Preventive Medicine (ISPM), the National Institute for Cancer Epidemiology and Registration (NICER) and the Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) had access to this press release one working day before its publication.