

New study provides baseline to measure impact of cervical cancer elimination objectives

Lyon, France, 5 December 2019 – A new study led by researchers from the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) and the Belgian Cancer Centre of the Sciensano Institute, published today in *The Lancet Global Health*,¹ provides a comprehensive assessment of the global incidence and mortality patterns of cervical cancer. Based on the GLOBOCAN estimates for 2018, which are available from the IARC Global Cancer Observatory (<http://gco.iarc.fr/today>), this study serves as a baseline from which to measure the future impact of the World Health Organization (WHO) Global Cervical Cancer Elimination Initiative².

In 2018, an estimated 570 000 women were diagnosed with cervical cancer worldwide and approximately 311 000 women died from the disease. Almost 85% of the new cases occurred in low-resource countries. Cervical cancer incidence rates vary markedly across countries and regions; the estimated age-standardized (World) incidence rates³ have a 40-fold range worldwide.

The knowledge that persistent infection with high-risk human papillomavirus (HPV) types is the main cause of cervical cancer has opened up novel pathways of primary and secondary prevention. In 2018, the WHO Director-General launched a call to all the world's countries to mobilize resources to help end the suffering caused by cervical cancer. To follow on this call, and at the request of Member States, a Draft Global Strategy towards the Elimination of Cervical Cancer as a Public Health Problem will be presented for approval at the World Health Assembly in May 2020. The Draft Strategy outlines key goals and agreed targets to be reached by 2030, which will set the world on the track to elimination. These goals are to vaccinate against HPV at least 90% of all girls by age 15 years, screen at least 70% of women twice by age 35 years and age 45 years (treating at least 90% of all women with screen-detected precancerous lesions), and achieve a rate of 90% of invasive cancer cases managed.

“The study aims to provide a baseline from which to measure future achievements. However, it also serves to highlight the current paucity of high-quality surveillance data available locally to monitor the real-time impact of the initiative. This is the case particularly in lower-resource countries, where estimated cervical cancer incidence rates are very high,” say the study's lead researchers, Dr Freddie Bray, Head of

¹ Arbyn M, Weiderpass E, Bruni L, de Sanjosé S, Saraiya M, Ferlay J, Bray F. Estimates of incidence and mortality of cervical cancer in 2018: a worldwide analysis. *Lancet Glob Health*. Published online 5 December 2019; [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X\(19\)30482-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(19)30482-6)

² The Draft Global Strategy towards the Elimination of Cervical Cancer as a Public Health Problem presents a threshold for elimination globally and in each country of an age-adjusted incidence rate of less than 4 cases per 100 000 women-years.

³ An age-standardized rate is a summary measure of the rate, expressed per 100 000 person-years, that would have been observed if the population had a standard age structure. The World Standard Population, as used in GLOBOCAN, was first proposed by Segi (1960) and later modified by Doll et al. (1966).

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the Section of Cancer Surveillance at IARC, and Dr Marc Arbyn, Coordinator of the Unit of Cancer Epidemiology at Sciensano. “The sustainable development of population-based cancer registries in every country will be pivotal in this respect.”

The goal of eliminating cervical cancer as a major public health problem can be reached within a few decades in high-resource countries, but this may take until the turn of the century in the lowest-resource settings. The highest estimated age-standardized incidence rates, of more than 70 per 100 000, occur in Malawi and Eswatini, where about 6.5% of women develop cervical cancer before the age of 75 years. The disease is also the leading cause of cancer-related death among women in the eastern, western, central, and southern regions of Africa. China and India together account for more than one third of the global burden of cervical cancer; in 2018, there were an estimated 106 000 new cases and 48 000 deaths in China and 97 000 new cases and 60 000 deaths in India.

“This study provides a timely reminder to the global health community of the challenges ahead in defining comprehensive, integrated, and cost-effective strategies of HPV vaccination and cervical cancer screening in target populations with very different background incidence rates and resource levels,” says IARC Director Dr Elisabete Weiderpass. “Nevertheless, through the ongoing process of engaging stakeholders and mobilizing resources, the WHO Global Cervical Cancer Elimination Initiative can lead to cervical cancer being eliminated as a public health problem in all countries worldwide in this century.”

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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 e-mailing list, please write to com@iarc.fr.