Study reveals large disparities in survival for patients with HPV-associated cancers

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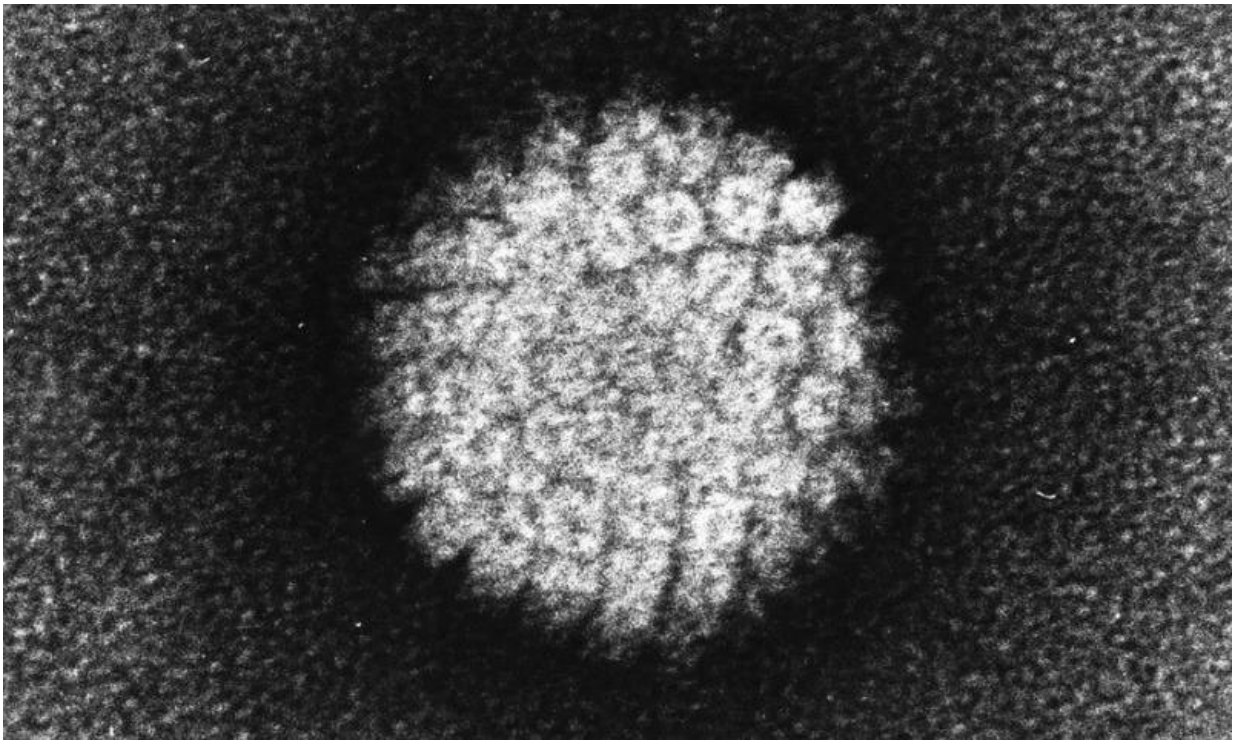

Electron micrograph of a negatively stained human papilloma virus (HPV) which occurs in human warts. Credit: public domain

A new study found large disparities by sex, race, and age in survival for patients diagnosed with different cancers caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV). Published early online in *Cancer*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society, the findings suggest that

improvements in HPV vaccination and access to cancer screening and treatment are needed.

HPV causes most cases of cervical cancer, but it can also cause cancers in other parts of the body, including the oropharynx (the base of the tongue, the tonsils, and the back of the throat), vagina, vulva, penis, and anus. More than 38,000 HPV-associated cancers are diagnosed annually in the United States.

Investigators at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion looked to see how survival rates vary for each of these cancers by certain demographic characteristics, such as race and age. The team examined data from 27 population-based cancer registries covering approximately 59 percent of the US population. The researchers focused on invasive cancer diagnosed from 2001-2011 and followed these cases through 2011.

The five-year relative survival was 64 percent for cervical carcinomas, 53 percent for vaginal, 66 percent for vulvar, 47 percent for penile, 66 percent for anal, 56 percent for rectal, and 51 percent for oropharyngeal squamous cell carcinomas. Five-year relative survival was consistently higher among white individuals than black individuals for all HPV-associated cancers and all age groups, and the largest differences were for oropharyngeal squamous cell carcinomas among those younger than 60 years and for penile squamous cell carcinomas among those aged 40-49 years compared with other age groups. Also, older people with HPV-associated cancers tended to die sooner after diagnosis than younger people, and men with an HPV-associated cancer of the anus were likely to die sooner than women with the same cancer.

"This new study shows that race, sex, and age can make a difference in surviving HPV-associated cancers said co-author Mona Saraiya, MD,

MPH. "There are things that people can do to avoid getting an HPV-related cancer, or to help improve their chances of survival such as getting the HPV vaccine when recommended at the age of 11 or 12 years old (or as early as age 9 and as late as age 26); getting screened for cervical cancer at the recommended ages; and for those who have been diagnosed with an HPV-associated cancer, working with their healthcare provider to create a personalized plan for care. Health care providers can take steps to assure that they are offering the recommended screening and treatment, regardless of a patient's race, age or sex."

More information: Hilda Razzaghi et al, Five-year relative survival for human papillomavirus-associated cancer sites, *Cancer* (2017). DOI: 10.1002/cncr.30947

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