

COVID-related delays to colorectal cancer screening causing 11.9% rise in death rates, research reveals

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New research presented today at UEG Week Virtual 2020 has shown that delays in colorectal cancer (CRC) screening caused by COVID-19

has resulted in significantly increased death rates for the cancer.

Researchers at the University of Bologna produced a model to forecast the impact of time delays in CRC screening on CRC mortality caused by COVID-19. The results found that moderate (7-12 months) and large (>12 months) delays in screening caused a 3% and 7% increase in advanced stage CRC respectively.

Based on [survival rates](#) at five years for stage III-IV CRC, the results showed a significant 11.9% increase in deaths when comparing a zero-to three-month delay to a >12 month delay.

CRC (or [bowel cancer](#)) is Europe's second largest cancer killer and the most common digestive cancer. Annually, there are 375,000 newly diagnosed cases in the EU and it claims the lives of over 170,000 people.

Screening aids the early detection of CRC, and since the rollout of screening programs across Europe there has been a steady decline in mortality rates. However, since the start of the pandemic, screening programs have been suspended in many areas across Europe.

Lead author of the study, Professor Luigi Ricciardiello, says, "Around the globe, healthcare systems are facing serious difficulties while dealing with COVID-19 and it is imperative that support is given to the public and patients throughout the crisis, including for high-impact diseases such as [colorectal cancer](#). Healthcare authorities need to act urgently on how they reorganize activities during COVID-19, without compromising the diagnosis of other high-impact diseases like this research shows."

Unhealthy lifestyles, such as diets high in processed foods, smoking and heavy alcohol consumption are linked to the development of CRC. Symptoms include persistent rectal bleeding, a change in bowel habits, abdominal pain and unexplained weight loss.

"Early-stage diagnosis of colorectal [cancer](#) is crucial—it's far easier to treat and enhances optimal patient outcomes," adds Professor Ricciardiello. "It is therefore essential that vital diagnosis tools, like screening programs, continue and help to prevent mortality rates from rising even further."

Provided by Spink Health

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