

Women's cancer screenings plummeted during pandemic

June 30 2021



(HealthDay)—Breast and cervical cancer screenings dropped sharply

among low-income minority women during the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says.

That could lead to delayed cancer diagnoses, [health consequences](#) and an increase in existing disparities, the agency warned.

The new findings "reinforce the need to safely maintain routine health care services during the pandemic, especially when the health care environment meets COVID-19 safety guidelines," said lead study author Amy DeGroff, a CDC health scientist.

Compared with the previous five-year averages for April, screening tests received by women through CDC's National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program for underserved women were 87% lower for breast cancer and 84% lower for cervical cancer in April 2020.

Declines in [breast cancer](#) screening ranged from 84% among Hispanic women to 98% among American Indian/Alaskan Native women. Declines in cervical cancer screening ranged from 82% among Black women to 92% among Asian Pacific Islander women.

Breast cancer screenings were 86% lower in [metro areas](#), 88% lower in [urban areas](#) and 89% lower in [rural areas](#) compared to the previous five-year averages, the findings showed. Declines in cervical cancer screenings were 85% in metro areas, 82% in rural areas and 77% in urban areas.

Screening rates had started to recover in all groups by June 2020, which was the end of the analysis period.

Factors that might have contributed to the declines included screening site closures and temporary suspension of breast and cervical cancer screening services due to COVID-19, according to the CDC.

It's also likely that stay-at-home orders/recommendations and fear of contracting COVID-19 deterred women from booking diagnostic tests, the study authors suggested.

"This study highlights a decline in cancer screening among women of racial and ethnic minority groups with low incomes when their access to medical services decreased at the beginning of the pandemic," DeGroff said in a CDC news release.

"CDC encourages [health care professionals](#) to help minimize delays in testing by continuing routine cancer screening for women having symptoms or at high risk for breast or [cervical cancer](#)," she added.

DeGroff noted the benefits of the Early Detection Program, saying it can help women overcome barriers to health equity by educating them about the importance of routine screening, addressing their concerns about COVID-19 transmission, and helping them to safely access screening.

The study was published online June 30 in the journal *Preventive Medicine*.

More information: The U.S. National Cancer Institute has more on [cancer screening](#).

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Citation: Women's cancer screenings plummeted during pandemic (2021, June 30) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-06-women-cancer-screenings-plummeted-pandemic.html>

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