

No decrease in childhood cancer detection in Canada during the pandemic

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During the first 9 months of the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers did not find a significant difference in the number of new cancer diagnoses in Canadian children compared with before the pandemic, according to a study published in *CMAJ* (*Canadian Medical Association Journal*).

"Our findings suggest that among children in Canada, [cancer diagnosis](#)

was not delayed during the pandemic, unlike findings described in previous reports," writes Dr. Marie-Claude Pelland-Marcotte, an oncologist at CHU de Québec—Université Laval, with coauthors.

Evidence from countries such as the Netherlands and the United Kingdom has shown as much as a 50% reduction in cancer incidence after March 2020, and other studies have found decreases in new cancer diagnoses, visits and surgeries. Studies from the United States and Japan suggest a marked reduction in new cancers and advanced illness when cancers are diagnosed.

Using data from the Cancer in Young People in Canada registry, which contains data from all 17 Canadian pediatric hematology–oncology centres, the study published in *CMAJ* included all patients who were younger than 15 years of age when cancer was diagnosed between March 2016 and November 2020. The authors compared rates before and during the early phase of the pandemic (March to November 2020).

"In addition, we observed no significant differences in the proportion of patients enrolled in a clinical trial, presenting with metastatic disease or who died within 30 days of presentation," the authors write.

As the researchers looked at only the first 9 months of the pandemic, they caution that there may be further changes in cancer detection and outcomes in the longer term.

"Although these results are reassuring, continued surveillance is necessary to ascertain potential long-term negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic among children with cancer," they conclude.

More information: Marie-Claude Pelland-Marcotte et al, Incidence of childhood cancer in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic, *Canadian Medical Association Journal* (2021). [DOI: 10.1503/cmaj.210659](https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.210659)

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