

Assessing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on cancer prevention

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A review of the international effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on cancer prevention, led by researchers at Queen Mary University of London, found that prevention services were severely affected in the early months, and in some places are still recovering.

The study looked at vaccination, chemoprevention, and surgical cancer prevention programs, and at screening services for breast, colorectal, and cervical cancers.

It also examined how [lifestyle changes](#) (smoking, [alcohol](#), and weight) due to the pandemic will affect future cancer rates, as large numbers of additional cancers or additional late-stage cancers have been predicted for the future as a result of the disruption.

Researchers conclude that how many additional predicted cancer deaths can still be avoided will depend on service recovery, but they note that colorectal screening programs in several countries were swift to return to pre-pandemic activity, and that the UK NHS Breast Cancer Screening Programme is now screening 150,000 more women and detecting in excess of 3,000 more cancers per year than in the pre-pandemic period.

Lead author Professor Stephen Duffy of the Wolfson Institute of Population Health said, "A price will be, and is already being paid for pandemic disruption to [cancer prevention](#) and screening services, with higher incidence of some cancers, and later diagnosis and poorer survival for others, but the answer is obvious: Bring the services back to equal or higher activity levels than pre-pandemic as quickly as possible."

"The pandemic caused a worsening of inequalities in delivery of cancer screening services, with [communities](#) underserved by health care provision often the hardest hit, and providers have a duty to address the inequalities in cancer during the recovery."

The study is published in the journal *Annual Review of Medicine*.

More information: Stephen W. Duffy et al, Effects on Cancer Prevention from the COVID-19 Pandemic, *Annual Review of Medicine* (2023). [DOI: 10.1146/annurev-med-051022-122257](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-med-051022-122257)

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