

# Decrease in head and neck cancer incidence seen during pandemic

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During the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the incidence of head and neck cancer (HNC) decreased, according to a study published online Jan. 11 in *JAMA Otolaryngology-Head & Neck Surgery*.

Jason Semprini, Ph.D., from the University of Iowa College of Public Health in Iowa City, and colleagues examined the change in localized versus advanced HNC incidence rates before and during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic in a cross-sectional study of patients diagnosed with HNC from 2017 to 2020 in the United States.

The researchers found that in 2019, an estimated 21,664 patients were diagnosed with [oral cavity](#) and pharynx cancer compared with 20,390 in 2020. From 2019 to 2020, there was a decrease in the HNC incidence rate from 11.6 to 10.8 cases per 100,000 people.

During the same period, the incidence rate of localized cancer decreased 7.9 percent to 8.8 cases. During the first year of the pandemic, the localized cancer incidence decreased the most among men, Hispanic patients, and individuals with larynx cancer (−9.3, −12.9, and −14.3 percent, respectively). For advanced HNC, there was no change observed in the overall incidence rate.

"This current analysis provides baseline data for how the COVID-19 pandemic potentially affected HNC incidence and highlights areas in which interventions and research may be needed to improve future outcomes for patients with HNC," the authors write.

**More information:** Jason Semprini et al, Head and Neck Cancer Incidence in the United States Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic, *JAMA Otolaryngology–Head & Neck Surgery* (2024). [DOI: 10.1001/jamaoto.2023.4322](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamaoto.2023.4322)

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