

# U.S. cancer incidence trends lower than expected in 2021

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U.S. cancer incidence trends improved in 2021, but continued to be lower than expected, according to a study published online Sept. 6 in *JAMA Network Open*.

Todd Burus, from the University of Kentucky in Lexington, and colleagues conducted a cross-sectional, population-based study of cancer incidence trends using the Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results 22 (SEER-22) Registries Database to examine observed versus expected cancer rate trends for January 2020 to December 2021.

In 2020 and 2021, the SEER-22 registries reported 1,578,697 cancer cases (50.6 percent among males and 57.6 percent among persons aged 65 years or older). The researchers found that all-sites cancer incidence rates were 9.4, 2.7, and 6.0 percent lower than expected in 2020, 2021, and in both years combined, respectively, resulting in 149,577 potentially undiagnosed cancer cases. Of the four screening-detected cancers, in 2021, there was a significant recovery for female breast cancer only (expected rates exceeded by 2.5 percent), while significant reductions persisted for [lung cancer](#) and [cervical cancer](#) (9.1 and 4.5 percent lower than expected, respectively), especially for early stage at diagnosis. Among female individuals, persons aged younger than 65 years, and persons of non-Hispanic Asian and Pacific Islander race and ethnicity, rates of all-sites cancer incidence returned to prepandemic trends.

"This study suggests that cancer cases in the U.S. continued to be underdiagnosed during the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic," the authors write. "Particular attention should be directed at strategies to immediately increase cancer screenings to make up lost ground and prevent a future surplus of late-stage diagnoses."

One author disclosed ties to the [pharmaceutical industry](#).

**More information:** Todd Burus et al, COVID-19 and Rates of Cancer Diagnosis in the US, *JAMA Network Open* (2024). [DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.32288](#)

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