COVID-19 Pandemic
Newly Diagnosed Cancers

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? How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected numbers of newly diagnosed cancers?

Background

Numbers of newly diagnosed cancers sharply declined in the first 2 months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Whether these numbers have recovered over the first year of the pandemic has not been reported.
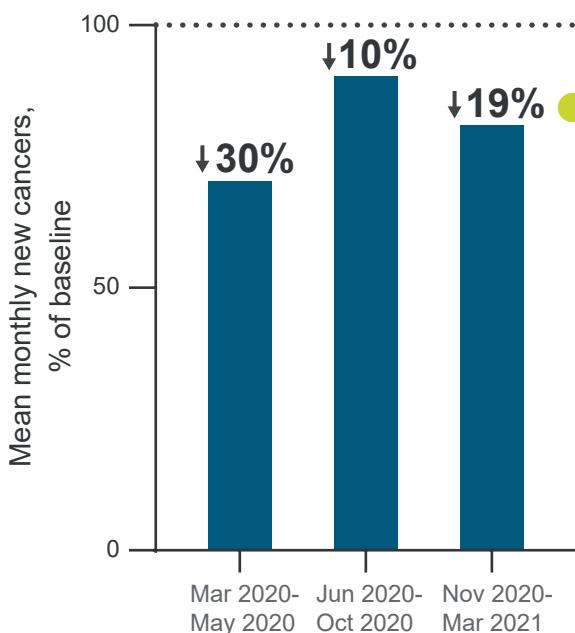
Results

Decreases in Newly Diagnosed Cancers[1]

Baseline: Jan 2019-Feb 2020

All Cancer Types

Mean monthly new cancers, % of baseline

↓30% (Mar 2020-May 2020)
↓10% (Jun 2020-Oct 2020)
↓19% (Nov 2020-Mar 2021)

After a partial rebound, the number of newly diagnosed cancers decreased again in the third period of the study.

Breast · Cervical · Colorectal · Esophageal
Gastric · Lung · Pancreatic · Prostate
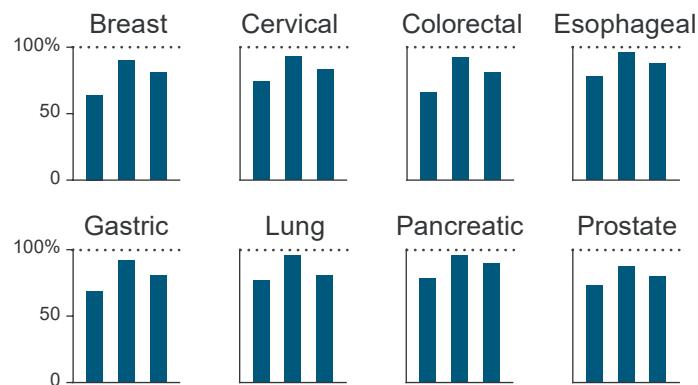
→ Newly diagnosed cancers remained well below baseline values a year into the pandemic, suggesting that many cancers remain undiagnosed.

1. Kaufman HW, Chen Z, Niles JK, et al. Changes in newly identified cancer among US patients from before COVID-19 through the first full year of the pandemic. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2021;4(8):e2125681. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.25681

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Article Title: Changes in Newly Identified Cancer Among US Patients From Before COVID-19 Through the First Full Year of the Pandemic

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Background

- In the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released guidance that cancer screening and other prevention services be postponed.
- In a previous nationwide study, the investigators reported that the weekly number of 6 types of cancer diagnoses declined by nearly 50% during March 1 to April 18, 2020, compared to the pre-pandemic period.[1]
- **Objective:** This updated analysis examined changes in numbers of newly diagnosed cancers through March of 2021.

Methods

- In this cross-sectional study, patients were included if they (1) were tested at Quest Diagnostics for any cause from January 2019 through March of 2021; (2) were assigned an ICD-10 code for any of 8 newly diagnosed cancer types (breast, colorectal, lung, pancreatic, cervical, gastric, esophageal, prostate); and (3) had no ICD-10 entries for the same cancer type since January 2018.
- The mean monthly number of newly diagnosed cancers during each pandemic period was compared to that of the pre-pandemic period:
  - Pre-pandemic period: January 2019–February 2020
  - 3 pandemic periods: March–May 2020, June–October 2020, and November 2020–March 2021

Results

- Mean monthly numbers of newly diagnosed cancers across periods are summarized below:
  - January 2019–February 2020, pre-pandemic period: 32,407
  - March–May 2020, 1st pandemic period: 22,748 (29.8% decrease from baseline)
  - June–October 2020, 2nd pandemic period: 29,304 (9.6% decrease from baseline)
  - November 2020–March 2021, 3rd pandemic period: 26,204 (19.1% decrease from baseline)
- Compared to pre-pandemic values, the percent decrease in the mean monthly numbers of newly diagnosed cancers was statistically significant for all cancer types during the 1st and 3rd pandemic periods (all (P<0.1); the percent decrease in the 2nd period did not reach statistical significance, except for prostate cancer.

Conclusions

- Although the initial sharp decline in new cancer diagnoses was followed by a partial rebound in the second pandemic period, cancer diagnoses declined again in the third period. The finding that cancer diagnoses have not yet returned to pre-pandemic values suggests that a substantial number of cancers remain undiagnosed.
- Careful planning, which may include strengthened clinical telehealth offerings, is needed to address outcomes related to delayed or undiagnosed cancers.

Reference
1. Kaufman HW, Chen Z, Niles JK, et al. Changes in the number of US patients with newly identified cancer before and during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2020;3:e2017267. doi:10.1001.jamanetworkopen.2020.17267.