

# Tobacco causes one-third of cancers: ICMR

Kalyan Ray, May 19, 2016, New Delhi, DHNS



**Tobacco causes one-third of India's cancer. By 2020, it will cause 17 lakh new cancer cases, almost 50% of whom would die, says latest cancer registry data released by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) on Wednesday.**

But there is also a good news. A sharp reduction in the prevalence of cervical cancer has been observed in the recent years with barely any policy intervention.

"We have to understand why the cervical cancer rate is going down without any intervention and have to spread that knowledge," said R A Badwe, director, Tata Memorial Hospital, Mumbai.

Cervical cancer was at the top position among cancers for women in the last cancer registry data released in 2013. "But in the last two years, the number of cervical cancers are coming down in several registries," said G K Rath, head of oncology at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Delhi.

While vaccines against cervical cancer are available in the market, the government is toying with the idea of introducing the vaccine in the public sector. The cervical cancer is caused by human papilloma virus, and is preventable through vaccination. Notwithstanding the advances in medicine, there is no improvement from the 50% fatality rate for Indian cancer patients. In 2016, the cancer registries recorded 14.5 lakh new cases and 7.36 lakh deaths.

By 2020, the numbers are estimated to rise to 17.3 lakh cases and 8.8 lakh deaths.

"This happens because most of the Indian patients come to the hospital for diagnosis and treatment when the disease has spread regionally or in an advanced stage. The overall proportion of patients coming for diagnosis at early-localised stage is only about 12.5%," said Rath.

Among men, cancers for colon, prostate and rectum are on the rise whereas cancers of breast, ovary and lungs are increasing among women.

"Lung cancers among women are increasing probably because of smoking habits," Rath said. While tobacco related cancers are number one on the chart, another 30% of the burden comes from the cancers of the gastrointestinal tract and breast.

The ICMR data, however, does not give a holistic figure about the entire country as big states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh are not properly represented in the population-based and hospital-based registries.

"At least 20% of cancer cases are not recorded in the registry," said A Nandakumar, ICMR scientist, spearheading the cancer registry programme.

Nevertheless, the new data provides fresh evidence in support of the trend that are known to cancer researchers.

Northeast remains India's cancer hub with Aizawl (Mizoram) and Papumpare (Arunachal Pradesh) recording the highest cancer rate respectively for males and females. Also cancers of the gall bladder is very high in the Gangetic plains but virtually non-existent in South India.