Current Health Event

Colorectal cancer

Cancer is a leading cause of death globally with an estimated 9.6 million deaths in 2018. Worldwide, the third most common cancer is colorectal with 1.8 million cases, after lung and breast cancers.
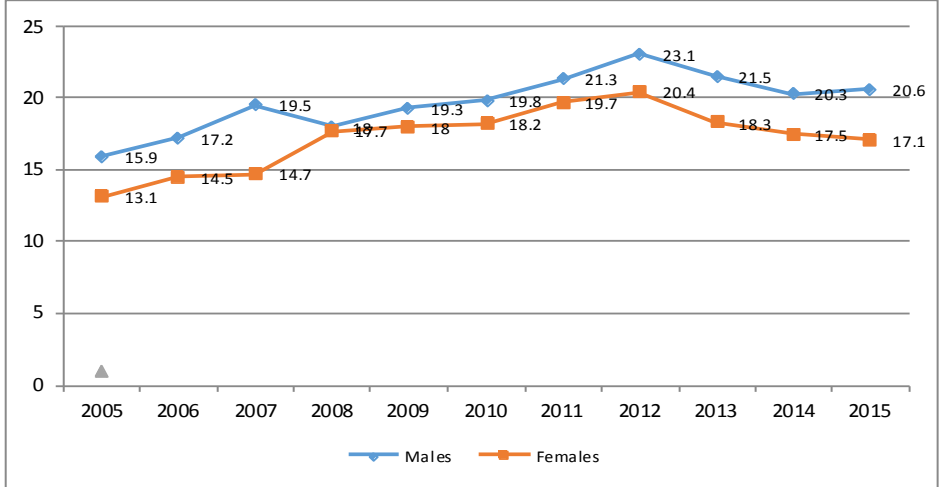
Editorial note:

Colorectal cancer is a term used to describe cancer that starts in the colon (large intestine) or the rectum. The majority of colorectal cancers originate from growths that form in the lining of the colon, called colorectal polyps. Colorectal cancer is a global public health concern. Colorectal cancer is the second common cause of cancer deaths with 862,000 deaths estimated per year globally (WHO, 2018).

In Lebanon, cancer is one of the leading causes of deaths, with 8,976 deaths (MOPH, 2018). Colorectal cancer in Lebanon is the second most common cancer in women, after breast cancer and the fourth most common in men, after prostate, lung, and bladder cancer (MOPH cancer registry, 2015). Colorectal cancer accounts for around 8.5% of cancer deaths (WHO, 2018). The mean age at diagnosis of colorectal cancer is 65 years in female and 66 in male. Figure 1 provides crude incidence rates for colorectal cancer in Lebanon (2005-2015, both sexes).

Association with behavioural risk factors such as diet, smoking, alcohol intake, and physical inactivity is observed in a large proportion of cases. Colorectal cancer has a high cure rate if detected early and treated according to best practices. There are several screening options for the early detection of colorectal cancer, including faecal occult blood test, flexible sigmoidoscopy, colonoscopy, and colonography.

Figure 1: Colorectal cancer crude incidence rates /100,000 population, both sexes, Lebanon 2005-2015 (*source: Ministry of Public Health / Epidemiological Surveillance Program / National Cancer Registry*)

In Lebanon, the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) adopted the fecal immunochemical test (FIT) for screening and early detection. If the FIT is positive, the person is then referred to colonoscopy for more in-depth assessment.

In addition, with WHO support, the MOPH developed national guidelines for colorectal early detection and is conducting national awareness campaigns to sensitize the public on the matter. The MOPH also has a cancer registry for collection and analysis of cancer data for evidence-informed decision-making. The registry provides information on incidence and a description of cancer by time, place, persons and disease.

WHO response

WHO supports Governments in achieving the targets specified in the *Global Action Plan for the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases (2013-2020)*, specifically a "25% relative reduction in the overall mortality from cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes, or chronic respiratory diseases".

In 2017, the World Health Assembly passed the resolution *Cancer Prevention and Control through an Integrated Approach (WHA70.12)* urging governments to accelerate action to achieve the targets specified in the Global Action plan and the *2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development* to reduce premature mortality from cancer.

Notifiable Diseases in Lebanon [Cumulative n° of cases among all Residents (among Syrians)] as of 9 March 2019				
Disease	**2018**	**2019**	**Jan 19**	**Feb 19**
Vaccine Preventable Diseases				
Polio	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
AFP	88 (33)	16 (2)	9 (1)	7 (1)
Measles	952 (156)	267 (12)	124 (3)	140 (7)
Mumps	121 (41)	17 (4)	9 (1)	8 (3)
Pertussis	64 (26)	9 (4)	7 (3)	2 (1)
Rabies	3 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Rubella	11 (4)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Tetanus	2 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Viral Hep. B	253 (28)	36 (7)	21 (3)	14 (4)
Water/Food Borne Diseases				
Brucellosis	242 (26)	21 (3)	8 (0)	12 (3)
Cholera	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Hydatid cyst	8 (2)	3 (0)	0 (0)	3 (0)
Typhoid fever	237 (4)	35 (1)	19 (0)	15 (1)
Viral Hep. A	899 (152)	95 (31)	63 (24)	30 (17)
Other Diseases				
Meningitis	420 (82)	50 (8)	26 (6)	19 (1)
Viral Hep. C	103 (7)	14 (1)	9 (1)	4 (0)

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