

Current Health Event

Breast cancer

Breast cancer is the most frequent cancer in women worldwide. Breast cancer impacts around 2.1 million women yearly and causes the greatest number of cancer-related deaths among women.

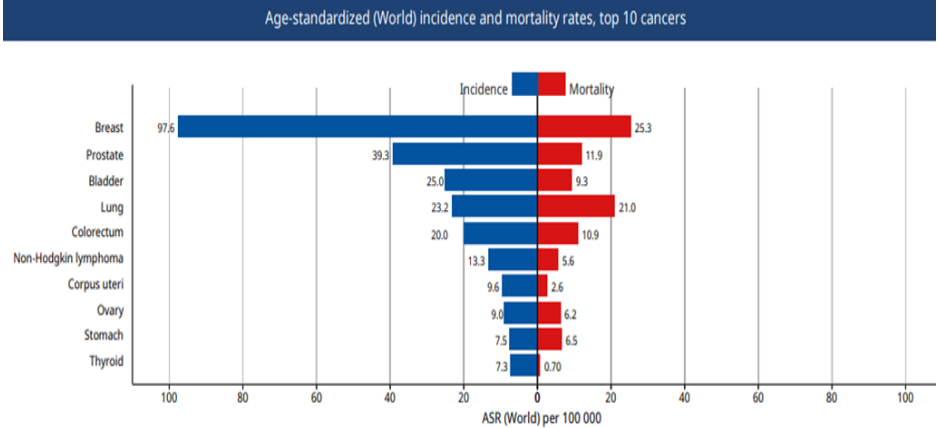
Editorial note:

Cancer is a leading cause of death globally with an estimated 9.6 million deaths in 2018. Breast cancer is the fifth leading cause of death with 627,000 deaths (6.6%) in 2018 ([Globocan 2018](#)). This represents around 15% of all cancer deaths among women. It is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in women. In Lebanon, cancer is a leading cause of deaths with an estimated 17,294 new cases in 2018 and 8,976 deaths ([WHO, 2018](#)). Breast cancer is the most prevalent cancer in Lebanon, with an age-standardized incidence rate of 97.6 per 100 000 persons per year and a mortality rate of 25.3 per 100 000 persons per year ([Globocan Lebanon factsheet 2018](#)). Breast cancer accounts for around 20% of all cancer cases.

The causes of breast cancer are not yet fully uncovered. Therefore, detecting the cases early remains the cornerstone of breast cancer control. Early detection is critical to improve breast cancer outcomes and survival. With early and adequate diagnosis and treatment, breast cancer can be cured. There are two early detection strategies for breast cancer: early diagnosis and screening. Although costly, mammography screening is the only breast cancer screening method that proved effective. Clinical breast examination can also be implemented in limited resource settings ([WHO](#)).

In Lebanon, the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) started conducting yearly breast cancer campaigns since 2002. The campaigns evolved from being just an awareness campaign during the month of October into becoming a national event spread over 4 months

Figure 1: Age-standardized (world) incidence and mortality rates ([Globocan 2018](#))



(October to January) with a screening component. A free mammography is offered in all 28 public hospitals and reduced fees in private hospitals. MOPH also covers reconstructive surgery after mastectomy.

In addition, the MOPH provides free of charge cancer drugs for the uninsured who account for around half of the total case-load. In an analysis of the financial burden of cancer drug treatment in Lebanon, highest costs were for breast cancer (35%) ([Elias et al., 2016](#)).

In addition, the MOPH with WHO support developed national guidelines for breast cancer screening, which advise starting screening at the age of 40, repeated yearly.

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.

WHO also develops guidelines such as the [Guide to cancer early diagnosis](#).

In terms of data on cancer, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) is the specialized cancer agency of WHO and has the objective of promoting international collaboration in cancer research ([Global cancer observatory](#)).

Notifiable Diseases in Lebanon [Cumulative n° of cases among all residents] as of 07 February 2020				
Disease	2019	2020	Dec 19	Jan 20
Vaccine Preventable Diseases				
Polio	0	0	0	0
AFP	87	11	13	11
Measles	1070	12	12	12
Mumps	124	2	5	2
Pertussis	78	8	5	8
Rabies	0	0	0	0
Rubella	26	0	0	0
Tetanus	0	0	0	0
Viral Hep. B	278	7	7	7
Other Notifiable Diseases				
Brucellosis	224	10	6	10
Cholera	0	0	0	0
Hydatid cyst	30	2	2	2
Typhoid fever	257	16	16	16
Viral Hep. A	426	18	12	18
Other Notifiable Diseases				
Meningitis	448	22	13	22
Viral Hep. C	78	8	3	8