

Announcement of methodological changes to Cancer registration in England

Background

To help users of our data monitor cancer activity and groups facing inequalities, this publication presents cancer incidence and mortality by different demographic factors including geographical areas. Previously we published incidence and mortality for England, former Government office regions, Cancer alliances and Integrated care boards. We now also report incidence for Upper tier local authorities (UTLA), Local Authority/unitary authority (LAUA) and Middle layer super output areas (MSOA).

To make fair comparisons of cancer rates across geographies, time periods, and population groups, we adjust (or “standardise”) our data for differences in age and gender. Age-standardised rates are calculated by applying the cancer rates seen in each age group to a common reference population — the 2013 European Standard Population (ESP). This reference represents an average European age profile, allowing us to compare cancer rates between areas or over time without results being affected by differences in population age structures.

The ESP includes people aged 95 and older, while population estimates from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) group everyone aged 90 and above together. To make these consistent, we combine the ESP weights for the 90–94 and 95+ age groups. As a result, the highest age band used in our cancer incidence and mortality calculations is “90 and over.”

This approach ensures that any differences in cancer rates reflect real variations in disease, rather than differences in the age or gender structure of the populations being compared.

Methodological changes

Sub-national geographies:

The publication will now report:

- Incidence of cancer using [National Disease Registration Service \(NDRS\) cancer groups](#) by combinations of gender, age group, deprivation, and stage at diagnosis (where appropriate) for England, former Government office regions, Cancer alliances and Integrated care boards
- Incidence of cancer using NDRS cancer groups by combinations of gender and age group (where appropriate), for Upper tier local authorities (UTLA), Local Authority/unitary authority (LAUA) and Middle layer super output areas (MSOA)

Methodological Changes

- Incidence and mortality (using ICD-10 3-digit codes) by gender and age group for England, former Government office regions, Cancer alliances and Integrated care boards

Standardised Rates:

When we present cancer rates by gender, we continue to standardise by age only. However, when we present rates for all persons combined, we now standardise by both age and gender. This change provides fairer and more accurate comparisons between populations that differ in both age and gender makeup.

Timing

The first publication to be affected by this change will be the October 2025 release, which will cover the period:

- Cancer diagnosed and deaths from cancer between 2001 and 2023 in England
- Cancer diagnosed and deaths from cancer between 2013 and 2022 for sub-national geographies

Impact

The impact of the above changes on Cancer registrations in England is expected to be minimal. Small differences may be seen when comparing to rates which have been age-standardised only.

Further information

Questions and feedback on the publication are welcomed and should be sent to NDRSenquiries@nhs.net or alternatively call 0300 303 5678.