

Incidence of Ovarian Cancer Varies In Europe

Europe has one of the highest incidence rates of ovarian cancer in the world, making it an important public health issue. A new, large-scale study of ovarian cancer trends found that while incidence of the disease is declining in most northern European countries, it is increasing in a few southern and eastern European countries.

Researchers led by Freddie Bray of the International Agency for Research on Cancer in Lyon, France, studied trends of ovarian cancer incidence and mortality in 28 European countries from

1953 until 2000 in order to try and understand the variation in trends among countries. They examined ovarian cancer data from 119 cancer registries in Europe according to year of diagnosis and age group and mortality data from the World Health Organization's mortality database, again according to year of death and age group.

Results show an overall leveling of ovarian cancer rates across Europe, with declining incidence and, especially, mortality rates in most northern countries, particularly among younger age groups. In

southern and eastern European countries, however, cancer incidence and mortality rates are increasing. The trends observed may be due partially to improvements in diagnostic techniques. Changing patterns of ovariectomy and hysterectomy across different countries over time may have influenced the rates reported in the study. But the most important factor for declining cancer rates in some countries is most likely the spread of oral contraceptive use in younger women, which has taken place earlier and, to a larger extent, in northern Europe, the authors note. In addition, lower parity in some European countries probably has played a role in the increase in ovarian cancer, while changing lifestyle habits also may have influenced the incidence and outcome of the disease.