

## New IARC study finds rising rates of colorectal cancer in younger people

**Lyon, France, 17 May 2019** – A new study led by researchers from the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), published today in *The Lancet Gastroenterology & Hepatology*,<sup>1</sup> found that in the most recent 10-year period of available data, incidence rates of colon cancer and rectal cancer in people younger than 50 years increased by up to 4% per year in seven high-income countries.

Although colorectal cancer continues to affect mostly people aged 50 years and older, recent studies have suggested that its incidence is increasing among younger people. This phenomenon has now been comprehensively assessed and confirmed in seven high-income countries: Australia, Canada, Denmark, Ireland, New Zealand, Norway, and the United Kingdom.

Data on more than 400 000 patients with colorectal cancer in these seven high-income countries were compared and evaluated, with a special focus on the age at diagnosis and the year of birth. This analysis thus made it possible to separately assess factors that affect the population regardless of age at a given time (e.g. changes in medical practice) versus factors that vary in generations of individuals as they age (e.g. changing prevalence and distribution of known or putative risk factors).

Increases in incidence rates among people younger than 50 years were most pronounced for cancers occurring in the rectum and in the distal (left) colon. Considerable upward trends in the risk of developing colorectal cancer were observed for those born after 1990 in all seven countries considered. This finding is contrasted with continuing declines or stabilizations in incidence rates in people aged 50 years and older; these trends are largely attributed to earlier detection.

These findings suggest that the pattern of colorectal cancer incidence is changing, with risk increasing in successive generations born towards the end of the 20th century in high-income countries in different world regions. Research into risk factors such as obesity is warranted, to identify the main drivers of the increase in colorectal cancer incidence in recent generations.

Sustained monitoring of trends in cancer incidence and risk factors remains key to successful cancer control, because these findings also have important implications for policy and for early detection programmes. Moreover, there is an acute need for innovative approaches to promote sustainable and healthy dietary behaviours, to reduce the prevalence of obesity.

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<sup>1</sup> Araghi M, Soerjomataram I, Bardot A, Ferlay J, Cabasag C, Morrison DS, et al. (2019). Changes in colorectal cancer incidence in seven high-income countries: a population-based study. *Lancet Gastroenterol Hepatol*. Published online 16 May 2019.

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### **For more information, please contact**

Véronique Terrasse, Communications Group, at +33 (0)4 72 73 83 66 or [terrassev@iarc.fr](mailto:terrassev@iarc.fr)  
or IARC Communications, at [com@iarc.fr](mailto:com@iarc.fr)

The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) is part of the World Health Organization. Its mission is to coordinate and conduct research on the causes of human cancer, the mechanisms of carcinogenesis, and to develop scientific strategies for cancer control. The Agency is involved in both epidemiological and laboratory research and disseminates scientific information through publications, meetings, courses, and fellowships. If you wish your name to be removed from our press release e-mailing list, please write to [com@iarc.fr](mailto:com@iarc.fr).