

Deaths from liver cancer nearly double since the 1990s, new figures reveal

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Over the last two decades, deaths caused by liver cancer have increased by 80%, making it one of the fastest-growing causes of cancer deaths worldwide.

According to the Global Burden of Disease Study, the most comprehensive worldwide observational epidemiological study to date, 830,000 people died as a result of the disease in 2016 compared to 464,000 people in 1990. This makes [liver cancer](#) the second leading cause of [cancer](#) deaths worldwide, after lung cancer.

Primary liver cancer, the most prevalent liver cancer worldwide, can be attributed to heavy drinking and other lifestyle choices but is most commonly caused by long-term infection with the [hepatitis B](#) or hepatitis C virus. These viruses are a major public health challenge, affecting over 325 million people, worldwide.

Globally, two out of three liver cancer deaths are caused by hepatitis B or C. The Western Pacific and South East Asia regions record the largest numbers of people living with the viruses and also some of the highest cases of liver cancer deaths globally. In China alone, over 260,000 liver cancer deaths caused by hepatitis B and C were recorded in 2016, accounting for a third of the global liver cancer [death](#) toll.

According to the findings, the hepatitis C virus was responsible for 160,000 liver deaths in 2016. The USA was amongst the top three countries with the highest numbers, alongside Japan and China. The American Cancer Society suggests this is because of the high rate of hepatitis C infection among baby boomers (born between 1945 through 1965), of which prevalence is approximately 2.6%, a rate 6-fold greater than that of other adults in the USA. Highly-effective cures for hepatitis C do exist which can halt progression to liver cancer, however only 3 of the 71 million people living with the virus globally, have accessed these life-saving

treatments in the last two years.

The study also found that 350,000 liver cancer deaths were caused by the hepatitis B virus, of which China and India accounted for 80% of these. The high majority of these deaths could have been prevented if people received the hepatitis B vaccination after birth. Today, only 52% of countries provide the hepatitis B birth dose vaccine to newborns.

"What many people don't realise is the correlation between the sharp increase in liver cancer deaths and the hepatitis B and C viruses", said Michael Ninburg, President of the World Hepatitis Alliance. "The rise in deaths is ultimately a result of poor vaccination coverage, lack of routine testing and inadequate access to effective treatment".

"Ahead of World Cancer Day, we are asking people to get tested for hepatitis B and C because that is a first vital step in prevention", said Raquel Peck, CEO of the World Hepatitis Alliance. "Together, we can stop cancer in its tracks".

More information: GBD Results tool: ghdx.healthdata.org/gbd-results-tool

GBD Compare tool: vizhub.healthdata.org/gbd-compare/

Provided by World Hepatitis Alliance

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