

1 February 2017 – In observance of World Cancer Day, 4 February, the World Health Organization recommends that health services focus on diagnosing and treating cancer early, so more people can survive this disease. WHO data indicate that 8.8 million people die from cancer every year. The majority of deaths are in low- and middle-income countries. A key contributor to these deaths is late diagnosis. In many cases, cancer is diagnosed late, making treatment and survival less successful.



## Improve early diagnosis to save lives

All countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region can save lives by improving early diagnosis. According to the latest Policy statements and recommended actions on the early detection of breast, cervical, colorectal, oral and prostate cancers in the Eastern Mediterranean Region : detecting the cancer when it is small and localized will lead to more people surviving the disease, and will make it less expensive to cure and treat cancer patients.

WHO encourages countries to focus on these 5 cancers because:

- breast cancer is the most common cancer among women and is increasing in all countries of the Region;
- colorectal and prostate cancers are also increasing;
- oral cancer is common in certain countries due to the high prevalence of tobacco, toombak and qat chewing;
- cancer of the uterine cervix, although low in the Region, gives the opportunity for the future potential elimination of this disease in certain countries in the Region.

## What are the steps to early diagnosis?

There are 3 steps to early diagnosis. Countries should:

- improve public awareness of different cancer symptoms and encourage people to seek care when these arise;
- invest in strengthening and equipping health services and training health workers so they can conduct accurate and timely diagnostics;
- ensure people living with cancer can access safe and effective treatment, including pain relief, without incurring prohibitive personal or financial hardship.

## Challenges in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

More than half of our countries are engaged in conflicts or experiencing population displacement. This creates additional challenges to addressing cancer in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Conflicts and population displacements make it even more difficult to access basic diagnostic service, including imaging, laboratory tests and pathology. These are all central to detecting cancers and planning treatment. Also, referring cancer patients to the appropriate level of care can be challenging because of the different capacities in countries.

## What does WHO recommend?

Countries should:

- prioritize basic, high-impact and low-cost cancer diagnosis and treatment services;.
- reduce the need for people to pay for care out of their own pockets, which prevents many from seeking help in the first place.

On this World Cancer Day, improve early diagnosis to save lives and cut treatment costs.

Related links

[Press release on early cancer diagnosis](#)

[Policy statements and recommended actions on the early detection of breast, cervical, colorectal, oral and prostate cancers in the Eastern Mediterranean Region](#)

[Cancer is one of 4 noncommunicable diseases](#)

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