Gen X May Face Higher Cancer Rates Than Boomers

People born between 1965 and 1980 are seeing more thyroid, kidney and colorectal cancers compared with previous generations.

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As members of Generation X start to enter their 60s, they are more likely to be diagnosed with cancer compared with previous generations, according to a new study by the National Cancer Institute (NCI).

Published in JAMA Network Open, the study found that if current cancer trends continue, "cancer incidence in the U.S. could remain unacceptably high for decades to come," according to NPR.

Led by Philip Rosenberg, PhD, a senior investigator at NCI's biostatistics branch, the study used data from about 3.8 million people diagnosed with malignant cancer from 1992 to 2018 to analyze cancer rates for Gen Xers (people born between 1965 and 1980) and baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) in the United States.

Of note, the study did not turn up any answers as to why Gen Xers are seeing an increase. "Our study can't speak to any particular cause," Rosenberg told NPR. "It gives you boots-on-the-ground intelligence about what is happening. That's where you go and look for clues about causes."

Rosenberg found that Gen Xers, the oldest of whom will be turning 60 in 2025, are more likely to be diagnosed with invasive cancer compared with boomers when they were 60. What's more, projections show that Gen Xers are more likely to be diagnosed with cancer than any previous generation born from 1908 through 1964.

Despite a decrease in recent decades of rates of certain cancers, including lung and cervical cancers, other cancers are becoming more common in Gen Xers and younger people.

For example, the study's projection model found increases in kidney, thyroid, colon and rectal cancers and leukemia in men and women. The study also projected increases in ovarian, uterine and pancreatic cancers and in non-Hodgkin lymphoma in women. In men, the study projected increases in prostate cancer.

What's more, projected increases for Gen Xers were consistent across all racial and ethnic groups except Asian or Pacific Islander men, who were less likely to have cancer at age 60 than if they were baby boomers.

Researchers believe improvements in early detection and a rise in obesity could help explain the rise in cancer incidence. Environment and exposure to pesticides, toxic chemicals and air pollutants may also play a role, researchers told NPR.

"We're in a situation where America's made great progress, but there's also great challenges in terms of preventing cancer," Rosenberg said.

To read more, click #Cancer Risk. There, you'll find headlines such as "Weight-Loss Drugs May Prevent 10 Types of Cancer," "40% of Cancer Cases and Almost Half of Deaths in U.S. Linked to Modifiable Risk Factors" and "Metabolic Syndrome and Obesity Raise Breast Cancer Risk."

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