



News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE.

Lung Cancer: Covid's hidden victim

Wessex Cancer Alliance is urging people to go to their GP if they have any concerns about their health which may be signs of cancer.

We all know that the current coronavirus pandemic has been destructive beyond measure, to human lives and the health of our population. But – the NHS is not closed and your GP is still here to help you and it is vitally important that the pandemic does not prevent people seeking medical advice when they need it.

Medical Director for Wessex Cancer Alliance, Matt Hayes, says “Our data tells us that fewer people are contacting their GP, but when they do a higher than usual percentage of the referrals made for suspected cancer are being diagnosed at a more advanced stage. This means people may be sitting on their symptoms – either because they think they might have Covid-19, or they are afraid to catch Covid-19, or maybe they think the symptoms will simply go away.”

Dr Andie Siggers, a GP in Dorset adds; “Worryingly, we have also heard that some people think their illness is less severe than Covid-19, so they decide to stay away to prevent being a burden on the NHS. Let me tell you now; you are not a burden, your life and your health is just as important as anyone else's and we want to help you but we need you to help us, and speak to your GP when you have a concern.”

Dorset respiratory consultant Jenny Graves says “One of the harder cancers to differentiate from the symptoms of Covid-19, is Lung Cancer. For many patients, the sign to look out for is a persistent cough – that is, one that lasts for three weeks or more. It is challenging because some patients with Covid-19 will be left with a persistent cough. We would advise that, if you have had a persistent cough for three weeks or more and are worried it might be Covid-19, book a test via the NHS Test and Trace website or call 119. If that test is negative, but your cough persists – then please speak to your GP as it may well be the sign of something else.”



Thoracic Surgeon at University Hospital Southampton, Aiman Altzetani has the following advice: “We know that this is a scary time and people are anxious about coming to hospitals but when it comes to cancer, it is a well known and proven fact that the earlier we catch your cancer, the better your chances of surviving will be. We have measures in place to keep you safe and the time you spend in hospital will be kept to a minimum for your tests but it really is vital that we find out what is causing your symptoms so we can rule out cancer or get you started on the treatment you need...

We are in particular, concerned about patients from ethnic communities who are reluctant to seek health advice due to a variety of barriers such as language or culture, we would like to assure them that we will be able to cater for their needs and arrange the necessary translators and cultural sensitive services to help them voice their concerns and get the timely and appropriate treatment”.

Lung cancer is not just something you get if you are a smoker, although that will increase your risk; there are other factors that can mean you are more at risk from this disease, such as family history, growing up around smokers and/or working in certain environments where asbestos may have been present for example. As well as a persistent cough, other symptoms can also be,

- coughing up blood
- sudden weight loss that you cannot explain
- fatigue (extreme tiredness)
- a loss of appetite.

If you speak to your GP and they are concerned your symptoms may be cancer, they will refer you on what is known as a Fast-Track referral. The first test that will be carried out, is a chest x-ray – many of which are currently taking place in sites away from where Covid patients are being treated, to help reduce the risk to patients and staff. You may also be booked for a CT scan, the results of which will be reviewed by a specialist. Your clinical team will explain everything to you and provide you with leaflets or links to online forms you can read to get more information.

Jenny Graves had this final message; “Lung cancer feels like the hidden victim of Covid-19 and patients should not feel like they cannot seek the support they need. It is our wish that people come to see their GP as soon as possible, not waiting to be in severe pain or discomfort before they seek help. We have measures in place to protect patients against being exposed to Covid-19 when they are in health care



environments. To make a diagnosis and start early treatment, we need to establish an early diagnosis and we can't do that if you stay away".

The NHS has been running the Help Us Help You campaign throughout the pandemic, and this month will see new TV and radio adverts, raising awareness of Lung cancer. We hope that people who think they were helping the NHS by keeping away, will see the importance of seeking help early, and book an appointment with their GP today.

ENDS

The National Lung Cancer campaign launches on Monday 15, February.

Lung Cancer Facts:

Lung cancer is the third most common cancer in the UK; however, it has the biggest impact on people's lives in Wessex by causing the greatest disability adjusted life years (DALYs)¹.

The majority of lung cancers are caused by cigarette smoke both primary and secondary smoking, but others will be because of occupational exposure to carcinogens or air pollution including exposure to Radon gas.

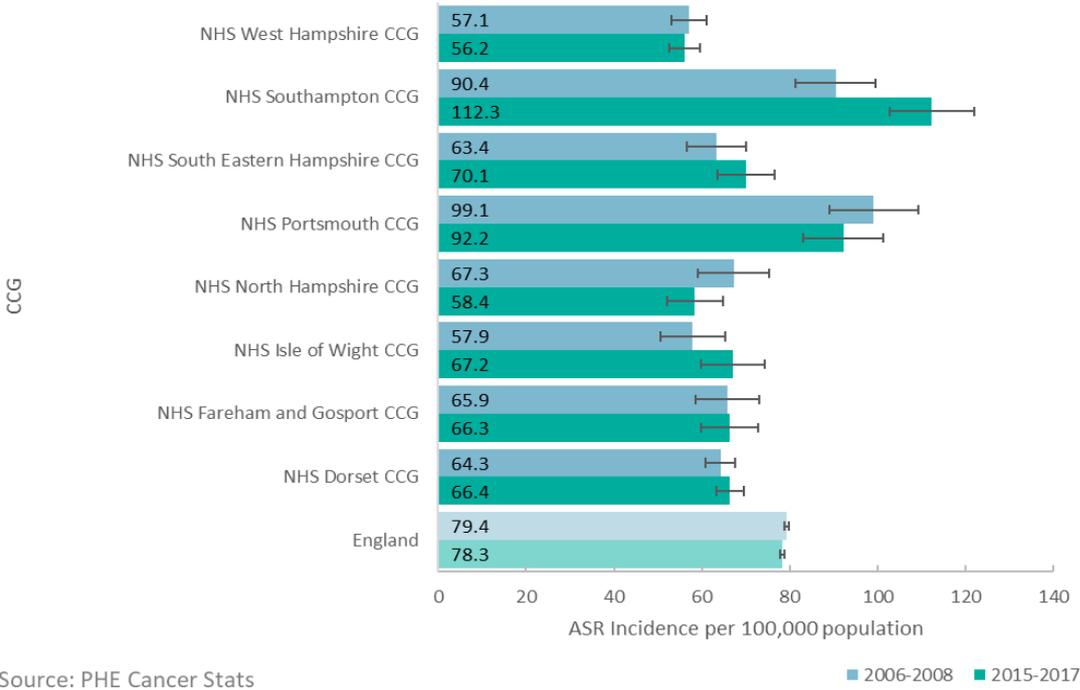
The chart below shows the difference in Lung cancer rates for Wessex from 2006-2008 and 2015-2017.

In many localities, you can see rates have started to drop, however, it is clear in the chart that there has continued to be a significant rise in Southampton, which has the added effect of extremely high air pollution in addition to higher smoking rates, and a small rise in Dorset, Fareham and Gosport and South East Hampshire

¹ Source: Global Burden of disease study 2017

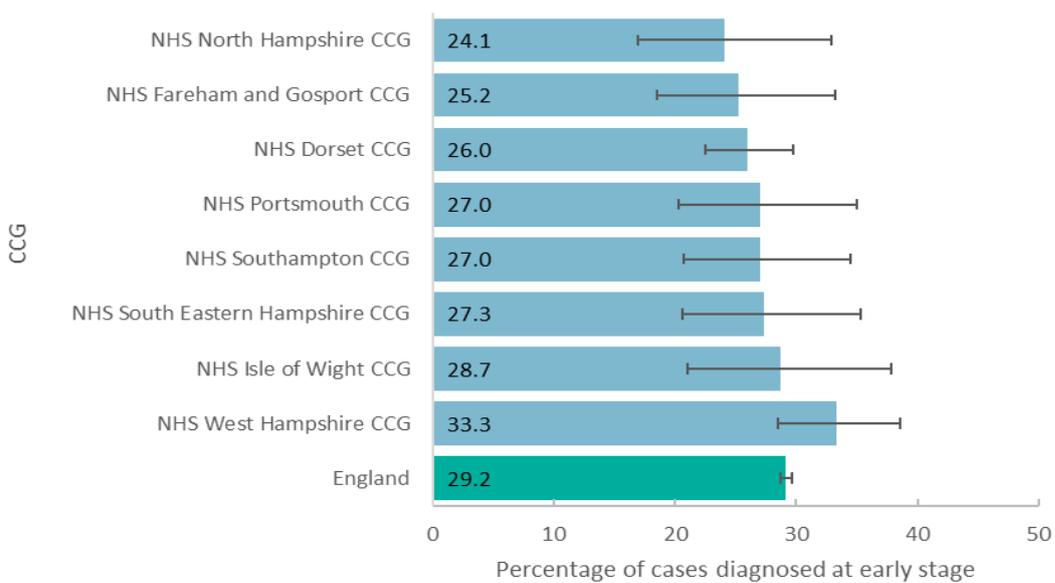


Change in Age-standardised Lung Cancer Incidence between 2006-2008 and 2015-2017 (three years pooled), Persons, All ages - CCGs in Wessex Cancer Alliance



Few lung cancers are diagnosed in stage 1 & 2, as the next chart shows. Between only 24.1% and 33.3% are diagnosed early which has a significant impact on a person's survival.

Percentage of Lung Cancer cases diagnosed at an early stage (stages 1 or 2), Persons (with stage recorded), All ages, in 2017 - CCGs in Wessex Cancer Alliance





Survival

The rate of survival of lung cancer is very much dependant on at what stage the cancer is diagnosed. CRUK data for England between 2013 and 2017 shows the following breakdown:

Stage 1 - More than 55 out of 100 people (more than 55%) will survive their cancer for 5 years or more after diagnosis.

Stage 2 - Around 35 out of 100 people (around 35%) will survive their cancer for 5 years or more after diagnosis.

Stage 3 - Almost 15 out of 100 people (almost 15%) will survive their cancer for 5 years or more after diagnosis.

Stage 4 - Almost 5 out of 100 people (almost 5%) will survive their cancer for 5 years or more after they are diagnosed.

[Cancer Matters Wessex](https://cancermatterswessex.nhs.uk/) launched in 2020 and provides people living in Hampshire, the Isle of Wight and Dorset, with all the information for cancer services and support available in their area. There are also a number of Cancer pathways that have been published for patients to find out what this journey may look like for them – the people/health professionals they will meet and the types of tests and treatment they may be offered. **The lung cancer pathway is here:** <https://cancermatterswessex.nhs.uk/lung-cancer-pathway/>

Nationally, there is a pilot currently underway called Targeted Lung Health Checks and in Wessex, we are lucky that one of our sites was selected to take part in this pilot. More [information can be found on our website](#).

Notes to Editors

More information about Wessex Cancer Alliance can be found here:
<https://wessexcanceralliance.nhs.uk/>

Available to interview upon request; Jenny Graves, Matthew Hayes and Andie Siggers

Andie Siggers and Jenny Graves both shared videos earlier in the year about lung cancer. You can view these here:

Dr Jenny Graves: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bw1ZcrCp0K8&feature=emb_logo

Dr Andi Siggers: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hLo_0rMUhu4&feature=emb_logo

Contact Us:

Please email: england.wessexcanceralliance@nhs.net

Media enquiries: england.wessexcanceralliance@nhs.net