



CANCER DIAGNOSES DROP IN COVID-19 LOCKDOWNS

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AN estimated 2530 cancer diagnoses were delayed or missed during the COVID-19-related restrictions in Victoria, according to research published today by the *Medical Journal of Australia*.

Using data from the Victorian Cancer Registry, researchers from Cancer Council Victoria, Monash University and the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre examined the temporal relationship between COVID-19 restrictions in Victoria between 1 April and 15 October 2020 and cancer pathology notifications, to estimate their impact on cancer diagnoses.

"During 1 April – 15 October 2020, there were 5446 fewer pathology notifications than predicted by our primary model (predicted, 54 609 v observed, 49 163; relative reduction, –10.0%)," wrote the authors, led by Dr Luc te Marvelde, Head of Data Analytics at the Victorian Cancer Registry.

"We estimated that there were 2530 undiagnosed cancers. The relative reduction was greatest during 1 April – 4 May 2020.

"By tumour group, the relative reductions were most marked for prostate cancer, head and neck tumours, melanoma, and breast cancer; they were greater for men, people aged 50 years or more, and for people in areas of higher socio-economic position.

"Changes in care delivery during the restrictions, including suspension of screening services and outpatient clinics and postponed surveillance of existing cancers, may have affected notification numbers for some tumour groups and consequently the estimated number of delayed diagnoses."

Te Marvelde and colleagues warned that there may be a "possible surge in cancer diagnoses over the coming 6 to 12 months".

"Media campaigns encouraging people to not further delay seeking medical attention, may ameliorate any negative impact of delayed cancer diagnosis," they concluded.

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