
Modern environment blamed for 40% rise in children's cancer cases

05/09/2016



The number of cancer cases in children has leapt by 40 per cent in less than two decades because of pollution, pesticides and gadgets, new analysis has shown.

There are 1,300 more diagnoses of the disease a year in people under the age of 25 compared to 1998 – costing the NHS £130 million extra a year.

Cases of colon cancer in children are up 200 per cent, while thyroid cancer cases have more than doubled.

Ovarian and cervical cancer cases have also seen stark rises – up by 70 per cent and 50 per cent respectively, analysis of ONS data by the charity Children with Cancer UK found.

Around 4,000 children and young people develop cancer each year and it is the leading cause of death in children aged one to 14 in the UK.

The 40 per cent jump in cases over 16 years is partially attributed to population growth, as the incidence rate per 100,000 people has risen by 30 per cent.

However, Professor Denis Henshaw, scientific director at Children with Cancer UK, said that lifestyle and environmental factors could play a part in the rise.

“These significant rises in cancer cases cannot be explained by improvements in cancer diagnosis or registration alone – lifestyle and environmental causal factors must be considered.”

He said that burnt barbecues, the electric fields of power lines, and hairdriers were contributors to the rise, as well as a pregnant women's diet and working shifts.

"We were shocked to see the figures, and it's the modern lifestyle I'm afraid. Many items on the list of environmental causes are now known to be carcinogenic, such as air pollution and pesticides and solvents."

He added: "What's worrying is it is very hard to avoid a lot of these things. How can you avoid air pollution? It sometimes feels like we are fighting a losing battle."

Children with Cancer UK are calling on the Government and medical and science community to ensure children with cancer have access to precision medicine by 2020.

The charity is hosting a three-day international conference on childhood cancer which begins today. It will look at precision medicine, immunotherapy and influenceable causes of childhood cancer.

Precision medicine – which considers an individual's genes, environment and lifestyle to provide more targeted treatment – needs to be offered to all young people within the framework of clinical trials by 2020, the charity's medical director has claimed.
