



Landmark report: many cancers could be prevented across the globe

Comprehensive, evidence-based recommendations for all parts of society

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About a third of the most common cancers in Hong Kong might be prevented through healthy patterns of diet, physical activity and weight management, says the World Cancer Research Fund Hong Kong, based on a landmark report that has set out recommendations for policies and actions to prevent cancer.

The report, Policy and Action for Cancer Prevention, published today by the World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF) global network, of which World Cancer Research Fund Hong Kong is a member, has estimated that about **43 per cent of colon cancer cases** and **42 per cent of breast cancer cases** in the UK could be prevented in this way.

The estimates for China are lower than for high-income countries such as the UK and the US, but in terms of lifestyle, Hong Kong lies somewhere between the two. But still it means that in China close to half a million cases of cancer deaths can be prevented each year.

The message of the Report is that all sections of society from governments to households should make public health, and cancer prevention in particular, a higher priority. And it includes estimates on the proportion of cancer cases that could be prevented through diet, physical activity and weight that demonstrate how important the issue is.

The overall estimate is that about a third of the most common cancers in high-income countries and a quarter in lower-income countries could be prevented. These figures do not include smoking, which alone accounts for about a third of cancers.

This means that the figure for Hong Kong is likely to be somewhere between these two estimates. This is because when it comes to the proportion of the population who are overweight, Hong Kong is similar to China. But people in Hong Kong eat less vegetables – but more fruit - and are less physically active than the mainland Chinese.

As part of the evidence-based report, thought to be the most comprehensive ever published on the subject, two independent teams of scientists systematically looked at the evidence for how policy changes and interventions influence the behaviours that affect cancer risk.

Following this, a panel of 23 world-renowned experts made 48 recommendations spread across different groups in society to follow. These groups are: multinational bodies; civil society organisations; government; industry; media; schools; workplaces and institutions; health and other professionals; and people. The recommendations include:

- Schools should actively encourage physical activity and provide healthy food for children.
- Schools, workplaces and institutions should not have unhealthy foods available in vending machines.
- Governments should require widespread walking and cycling routes to encourage physical activity.
- Governments should incorporate UN recommendations on breastfeeding into law.
- The food and drinks industry should make public health an explicit priority at all stages of production.
- Industry should give a higher priority for goods and services that encourage people to be active, particularly young people.
- Health professionals should take a lead in giving the public information about public health, including cancer prevention.
- People should use independent nutrition guides and food labels to make sure the food they buy for their family is healthy.

Professor Junshi Chen, a member of the Panel, said: “This Report shows that by making relatively straightforward changes, we could significantly reduce the number of cancer cases in Hong Kong, China and around the world.”

“In China, there are around 1.7 million cancer deaths each year. Given that 25% of the most common cancers can be prevented, it means that about 430,000 lives can be saved each year. Cancer such as esophageal cancer is even more preventable at 44%.”

“When people think of policy reports, they often think they are only relevant to governments. But while governments are important in this, the evidence shows that when it comes to cancer prevention, **all** groups in society have a role to play. This Report is relevant to everyone from heads of government to the people who do the weekly food shopping for their family.”

“We have been fairly specific about what different groups need to do. But the Report’s overall message is that everyone needs to make public health in general, and cancer prevention in particular, more of a priority.”

Professor Martin Wiseman, Project Director of the Report, said: “Making estimates on the proportion of cancer cases that are preventable is complex and challenging.

“The figures in this report have been agreed by eminent scientists and they are as accurate as they can be with the available data.

“On a global level every year, there are millions of cancer cases that could have been prevented and this is why we need to act now before the situation gets even worse.

“While we have not made specific estimates for the proportion of cancer cases in Hong Kong that could be prevented, this figure is likely to fall somewhere between the estimates for China and countries such as the UK and the US. This means it is likely that in Hong Kong, about a third of the most common cancers could be prevented.

“Also, the number of cancer cases in Hong Kong is projected to rise as people’s lifestyles continue to resemble those in Western countries. The good news is that this is not inevitable and we still have the chance to avert a crisis before it is too late.”

ESTIMATED PERCENTAGE OF CANCERS THAT COULD BE PREVENTED

	US	UK	Brazil	China
Mouth, pharynx & larynx	63	67	63	44
Oesophagus	69	75	60	44
Lung	36	33	36	38
Stomach	47	45	41	33
Pancreas	39	41	34	14
Gallbladder	21	16	10	6
Bowel	45	43	37	17
Liver	15	17	6	6
Breast	38	42	28	20
Endometrium (womb)	70	56	52	34
Prostate	11	20	n/a	n/a
Kidney	24	19	13	8
12 cancers combined	34	39	30	27

Notes to editors:

- The preventability estimates are about a third of the most common cancers in high-income countries and about a quarter in lower income countries.

- Because of the way that different lifestyle factors are inter-linked, it is not possible to simply add the preventability estimates from smoking and other lifestyle factors together to get a total.