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Decline in breast cancer for Jewish and Arab women

• By JUDY SIEGEL

More than 20,000 women who were diagnosed with breast cancer between 2007 and 2011 have recovered or are still struggling with the disease, according to the Israel Cancer Association and the Health Ministry's Center for Disease Control.

The ICA on Wednesday launched October as World Breast Cancer Awareness Month to encourage women of relevant ages and family histories to go for mammography and other testing.

Dr. Lital Keihan-Boker, depu-

ty head of the center, said that breast cancer represents nearly a third of all invasive tumors in Israeli women and causes a fifth of all cancer deaths in women. In 2011, 4,106 women were diagnosed with the disease, and around 1,000 died of it.

But the good news is that there has been a decline and then stabilization in the prevalence of breast cancer in Jewish women from the early years of the last decade and in Arab women from the end of that decade. Death rates are also down. The most common age of diagnosis of breast cancer

and mortality from it is over 50, but still, 12.5 percent of those who die of it were under that age.

Women aged 50 to 74 are encouraged to undergo mammography once every two years, at minimal expense, said Prof. Gad Rennert, who previously ran the national breast cancer program. Sixty-three percent of haredi (ultra-Orthodox) Jewish women take this advice, compared to 70% among other Jewish and Arab women. Fully 78% of women who were screened by mammography (not as a result of symptoms) were diagnosed

at the early first stage of the disease and thus had the best chance for recovery.

The ICA has launched a program to encourage women at-risk to undergo testing for the BRCA gene mutations that significantly raise the risk of a malignancy. The Esti Lauder-Israel company and the ICA are selling a blouse marked "This is a Pink Shirt" to raise money for the association to benefit its fight against breast cancer. The ICA will present information on breast cancer in newspapers and on TV and radio and well as through online media programs during October.