

18.63x36.41	1	4	עמוד	HAARETZ - FRONT	15/10/2012	34048613-9
טרט - 90336						

Report: Risk of breast cancer is rising for Israeli Jewish women

By Dan Even

The risk of breast cancer among Israeli Jewish women is rising, and Jewish women of all ages have a one in 7.5 chance of developing it – a 13.1 percent risk – according to a report released yesterday by the Health Ministry's Center for Disease Control. The rate among Arab women is falling, dropping to one in 14 women.

The figures are for 2008-2009, the most recent year for which full data are available. By comparison, in 2007-2008, Israeli Jewish women had a one in 7.9 of developing breast cancer, and Arab women had a one in 13 chance.

The rise in breast cancer rates among Israeli Jewish women is partly a result of improved programs for early detection of the disease, as well as an increase in the number of women who are screened, said Dr. Lital Keinan-Boker, deputy director of

the Israel Center for Disease Control. The higher rate also stems from increased life expectancy and the number of women who survive breast cancer, she said.

"Breast cancer is a disease of the Western world and the increase is a sign of westernization – in other words, lower birth rates and postponing the age of pregnancy," said Dr. Gad Rennert, the director of the national breast cancer screening program.

In 2009, the figures show a worrying rise in early-stage breast cancer, which is usually detected by mammography, which is included in the state-subsidized basket of health services. Mammography is recommended, and paid for by the health services, once every two years for women aged 50 to 74, and every year for women over 40 with a family history that puts them at risk of developing breast cancer.

The most common form of breast cancer in Israel is

invasive carcinoma. In 2009, 4,005 Israeli women were diagnosed with invasive forms of breast cancer, compared to 492 who were diagnosed with noninvasive forms. A growth in noninvasive breast cancer accounted for almost all of the rise among Israeli Jewish women, as early detection increased, said Keinan-Boker, adding that diagnosis of invasive cancer held steady over the period.

According to the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer, breast cancer rates in Israel are the fifth highest in the Western world. The rate in Israel is 96.8 women per 100,000, while the figures are 109.2 in Belgium, 101.1 in Denmark, 99.7 in France and 98.5 in Holland. Germany and Sweden have lower rates of 81.6 and 79.4 respectively. The lowest level in the Western world is in the United States, with 76 women per 100,000 developing breast cancer.

Various factors that research indicates are related to high rates of breast cancer are present among Israel's Jewish community – such as high socioeconomic status, an educated female population, low birth rates and postponement of child-bearing – said Keinan-Boker. Hormone-replacement treatments for menopausal women are another risk factor, as are hormonal fertility treatments, of which Israel has one of the highest rates in the world. Israeli women also have among the highest rates of the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genetic mutation, which is relatively common among the Ashkenazi Jewish population. MRI-based testing for women with these genetic mutations will start soon, as part of the state-subsidized health basket.

Despite the rise in the rate of breast cancer among Israeli Jewish women, and the relatively high number of such cases compared to other Western nations, death rates from it have been falling in recent years. Some 938 women died in 2009 from invasive breast cancer.

The mortality figures among Arab women also fell for the first time in 2009. "We are investing great efforts in increasing Arab women's response to come for examinations in various ways – for example, with organized transport of women from a specific village to a medical unit to conduct mammography or with the use of a mobile mammography unit in Arab communities," said Rennert.

Women with breast cancer have a 25 percent higher than average rate of developing another cancer, according to the Health Ministry figures.

The Israel Center for Disease Control's report was released in coordination with the Israel Cancer Association's annual door-to-door fund-raiser.

What young women need to know

Six months ago, while on a trip abroad at the age of 25, Maya Shani found a painful lump in her breast.

"At that age, of course I thought it was nonsense, but I told myself that when I got back to Israel I would see my doctor," said Shani, who moved to Israel from the United States five years ago and lives in Givatayim.

When she got back to Israel, Shani went to a surgeon, who ordered an ultrasound, and then a mammogram and a biopsy, before she was diagnosed with breast cancer. She has undergone chemotherapy, and three weeks ago she had a mastectomy.

And now she has a mission.

"It's important for young women to be aware that the disease can turn up at a young age, to be aware of changes in their bodies," said Shani.

The Israel Cancer Association is echoing Shani's message, as seen in a television campaign promoting a kind of Big Sister project in which breast cancer survivors help those who have just been diagnosed with the disease. This year, the ads include a young woman, in an effort to urge others in the same age bracket to be aware of changes in their breasts that could signal breast cancer – particularly given that one-fifth of breast cancer patients are under 50.

The ads are part of the cancer association's breast cancer awareness campaign, which it kicked off yesterday, in keeping with Breast Cancer Awareness Month, the international health campaign that takes place every October.

Dr. Gad Rennert, who heads Israel's national program for early breast cancer detection, said studies have shown that women who checked their own breasts underwent three times as many unnecessary biopsies, "meaning that they were subject to more harm than good." In addition, he said, there is no good, available means of testing young women for breast cancer.

But the incidence of breast cancer among Jewish women begins rising from 1.42 per 1,000 women between the ages of 20 and 24 to 30.5 per 1,000 for women aged 30-34. The risk more than doubles for the 35-39 age group, to 64.6 per 1,000, and more than doubles again, to 142.4 per 1,000, for Jewish women aged 40-44. It increases only slightly for the next half-decade, to 180.5, and keeps rising.

The rates for Arab women are lower starting from age 30, but the rise follows a similar pattern, with 130.6 per 1,000 Arab women aged 45-49 getting breast cancer. (Dan Even)