CRUK data brief

Cancer incidence in the UK, 2022

April 2026

Together we are beating cancer

CANCER RESEARCH UK

Contents

About this document

Reference

This report should be referred to as follows:

Cancer Research UK, 2026. CRUK data brief: Cancer incidence in the UK, 2022.

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Glossary

See information and explanations on terminology used for statistics and reporting of cancer, and the methods used to calculate some of statistics on Cancer Stats Explained

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the many organisations across the UK which collect, analyse, and share the data which we use, and to the patients and public who consent for their data to be used. Find out more about the sources which are essential for our statistics here https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/health-professional/cancer-statistics/cancer-stats-explained/data-collection-implications.

About Cancer Research UK

We're the world's leading cancer charity dedicated to saving and improving lives through research. We fund research into the prevention, detection and treatment of more than 200 types of cancer through the work of over 4,000 scientists, doctors and nurses. In the last 50 years, we've helped double cancer survival in the UK and our research has played a role in more than half of the world's essential cancer drugs. Our vision is a world where everybody lives longer, better lives, free from the fear of cancer.

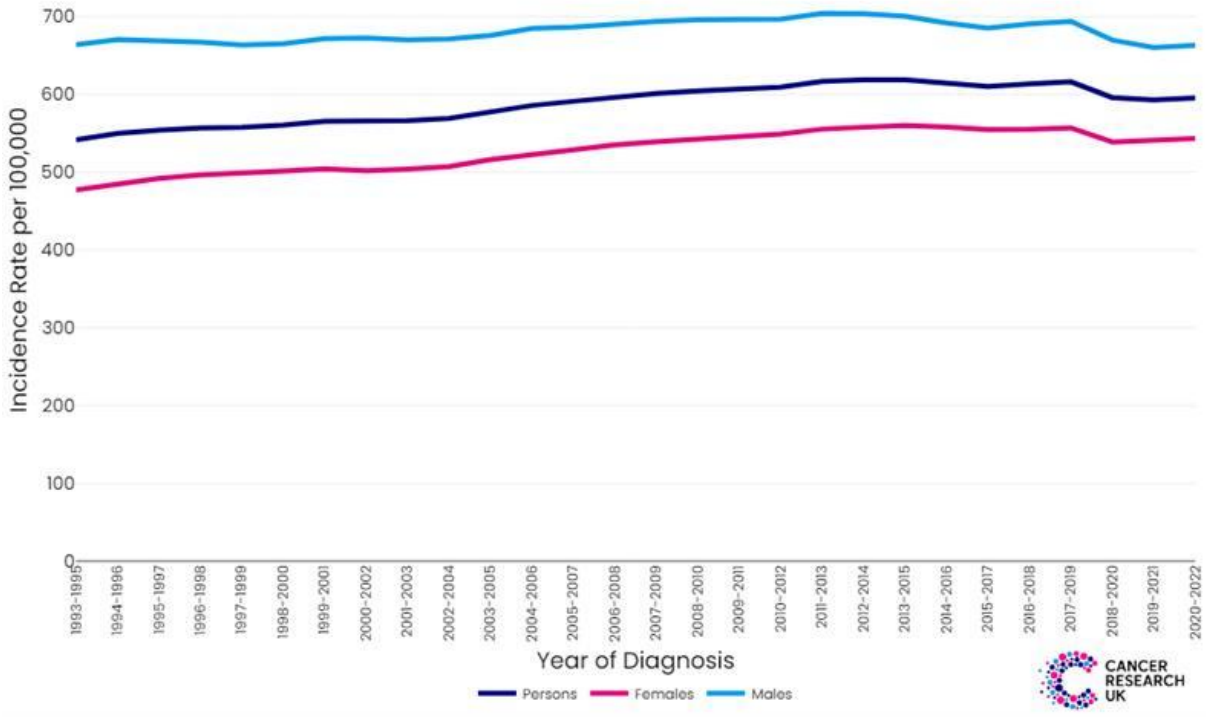
Key insights

- There are more than 403,000 new cancer cases in the UK every year (2019, 2021-2022). This is the highest-ever annual average number of new cancer cases in the UK. In females there are more than 195,000 new cancer cases every year, and in males there are more than 208,000 new cancer cases every year.
- Almost two-fifths (37%) of all new cancer cases in the UK are diagnosed in people aged 75 and over, and the highest incidence rates are in people aged 85 to 89 (2019, 2021-2022).
- Since the early 1990s, UK cancer incidence rates have increased by 15% - from 542 cases per 100,000 people in 1993-1995 to 620 per 100,000 people in 2019, 2021-2022. The pace of increase has slowed however, with rates increasing by 2% over the past decade.
- Incidence trends largely reflect changes or differences in risk factors such as smoking and overweight and obesity, as well as changes in diagnostic tools.
- Breast, prostate, lung, and bowel cancers together accounted for more than half (53%) of cancer cases in 2019, 2021-2022, with breast and prostate cancer together accounting for almost a third (29%) of all cancer cases.
- See more 2019, 2021-2022 UK cancer incidence statistics on our Cancer Statistics Data Hub

All cancers combined (excl. non-melanoma skin cancer)

Overall, cancer incidence rates have increased by 2% in the UK over the last decade (Figure 1). Rates in females have consistently been significantly lower than those in males and have increased by 3%, and rates in males have increased by 1%. Because of their historically higher rates of key cancer risk factors, males continue to have more cancer cases than females, with 208,000 cases in the UK each year compared with 195,000 in females (2019, 2021-2022).

Figure 1: All Cancers Combined (C00-C97, Excl. C44), European Age-Standardised Incidence Rates per 100,000 population UK, 1993-2022*

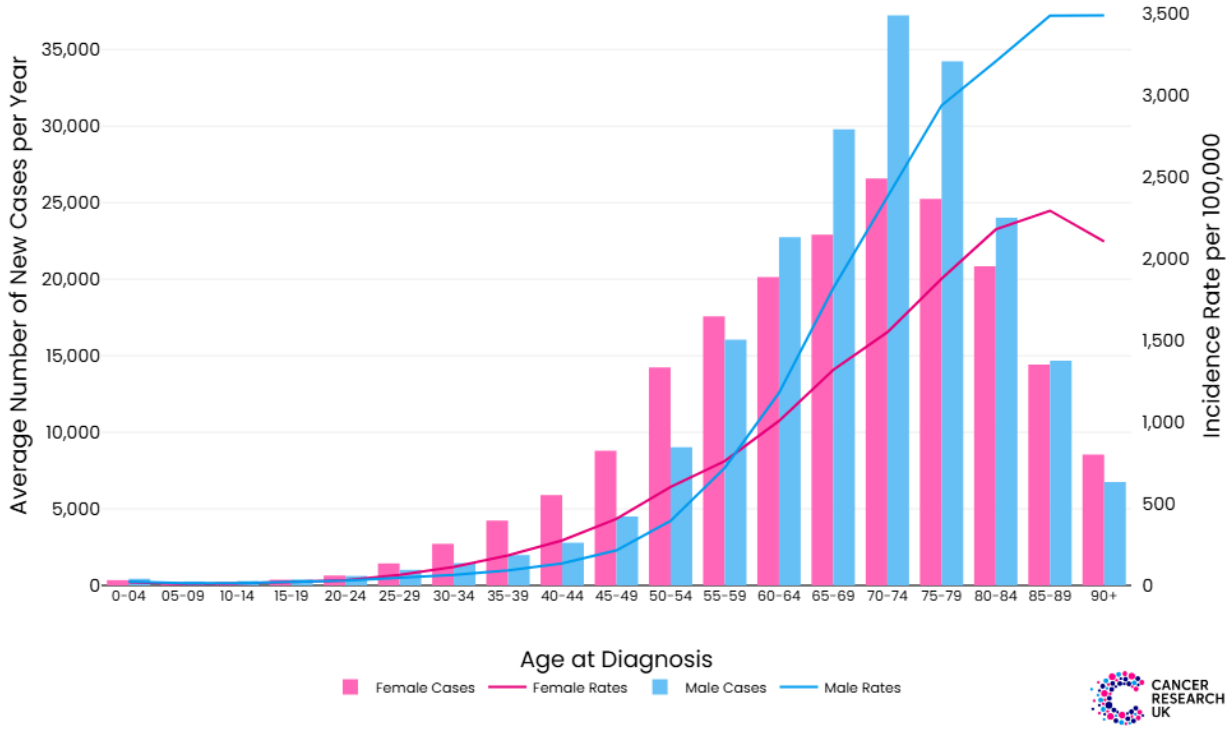


* Some historic cancer registration data for England have been updated following changes to skin cancer coding and the reclassification of some historic cancer diagnoses. As a result, the historic data may show greater variation than in previous versions of this analysis.

Each year almost two-fifths (37%) of all cancer cases are in people aged 75 and over (2019, 2021-2022) (Figure 2). The highest number of cancer cases occur in the 70-74 age group for both males and females (around 37,200 and 26,600 cases respectively, 2019, 2021-2022). Case numbers decline after this peak, largely reflecting a decreasing population size due to increasing all-cause mortality. In contrast, incidence rates in the UK continue to rise with age, peaking in people aged 85 to 89, before slightly dropping in the oldest age group, due to rising rates of competing causes of death.

For people aged 15-59, incidence rates are higher in females than in males, but from age 60 onwards rates are higher in males. This reflects differences in the types of cancer diagnosed in males and females – for example the incidence rate of prostate cancer (C61, male-specific) is highest in those aged 75-79, while cervical cancer (C53, female-specific) rates peak in those aged 35-39. There are also variations by age in cancers that affect both males and females.

Figure 2: All Cancers Combined (C00-C97, Excl. C44) Average Number of Cases per Year and Age-Specific Incidence Rates per 100,000 Females and Males, UK, 2019, 2021-2022



Cancers compared

Incidence rates have increased in the UK over the last decade for most cancer sites (Table 1). The biggest increases in incidence rates in the past decade are seen in thyroid and melanoma skin cancers:

- Thyroid cancer (C73) incidence rates have increased by 36% (from 5 per 100,000 in 2010-2012, to 7 per 100,000 in 2019, 2021-2022), thought to largely reflect increased numbers of diagnoses made incidentally during other medical procedures.
- Melanoma skin cancer (C43) incidence rates have increased by 26% (from 24 per 100,000 in 2010-2012, to 30 per 100,000 in 2019, 2021-2022), mainly due to increased awareness of possible melanoma skin cancer signs and symptoms, and the legacy of historical excess exposure to UV radiation.

However, some other cancer sites have seen decreases in incidence rates over the same period. The fastest decreases in incidence rates in the past decade are seen in cancer of unknown primary, and stomach cancer:

- Cancer of unknown primary (C77-C80) incidence rates have decreased by 28% (from 17 per 100,000 in 2010-2012, to 12 per 100,000 in 2019, 2021-2022). This mainly reflects reductions in late-stage diagnosis, e.g. a smaller proportion of cases now are diagnosed once they have metastasised and the primary site is harder to identify.
- Stomach cancer (C16) incidence rates have decreased by 21% (from 13 per 100,000 in 2010-2012, to 11 per 100,000 in 2019, 2021-2022), due primarily to falling prevalence of H Pylori infection thanks to improved sanitation and food hygiene.

Table 1: The 10 Most Common Cancers, Percentage Change in European Age-Standardised Incidence Rates per 100,000, UK, 2010-2012 to 2019, 2021-2022

Cancer (ICD-10 code)	Gender	2010-2012 Incidence Rate per 100,000	2019, 2021-2022 Incidence Rate per 100,000	Percentage Change
Breast (C50)	Male	1.4	1.4	Not significant
	Female	165.7	173.1	4.4%
Prostate (C61)	Male	179.3	192.2	7.2%
Lung (C33-C34)	Male	100.0	86.1	-13.9%
	Female	67.3	70.7	5.1%
Bowel (C18-C20)	Male	95.2	89.4	-6.1%
	Female	60.5	61.0	Not significant
Melanoma (C43)	Male	25.4	32.9	29.5%
	Female	22.6	27.6	21.9%
Kidney (C64-C66, C68)	Male	26.1	30.8	18.2
	Female	13.6	15.0	10.0%
Head and Neck (C00-C14, C30-C32)	Male	28.1	30.7	9.4%
	Female	11.3	12.6	12.1%
Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma (C82-C86)	Male	27.6	25.7	-6.9%
	Female	19.8	17.2	-13.1%
Brain, Other CNS, and Intracranial Tumours (C70-C72, C75.1-C75.3, D32-D33, D35.2-D35.4, D42-D43, D44.3-D44.5)	Male	19.5	19.3	Not significant
	Female	18.3	19.1	4.2%
Pancreas (C25)	Male	18.3	19.6	7.2%
	Female	14.9	15.9	7.2%

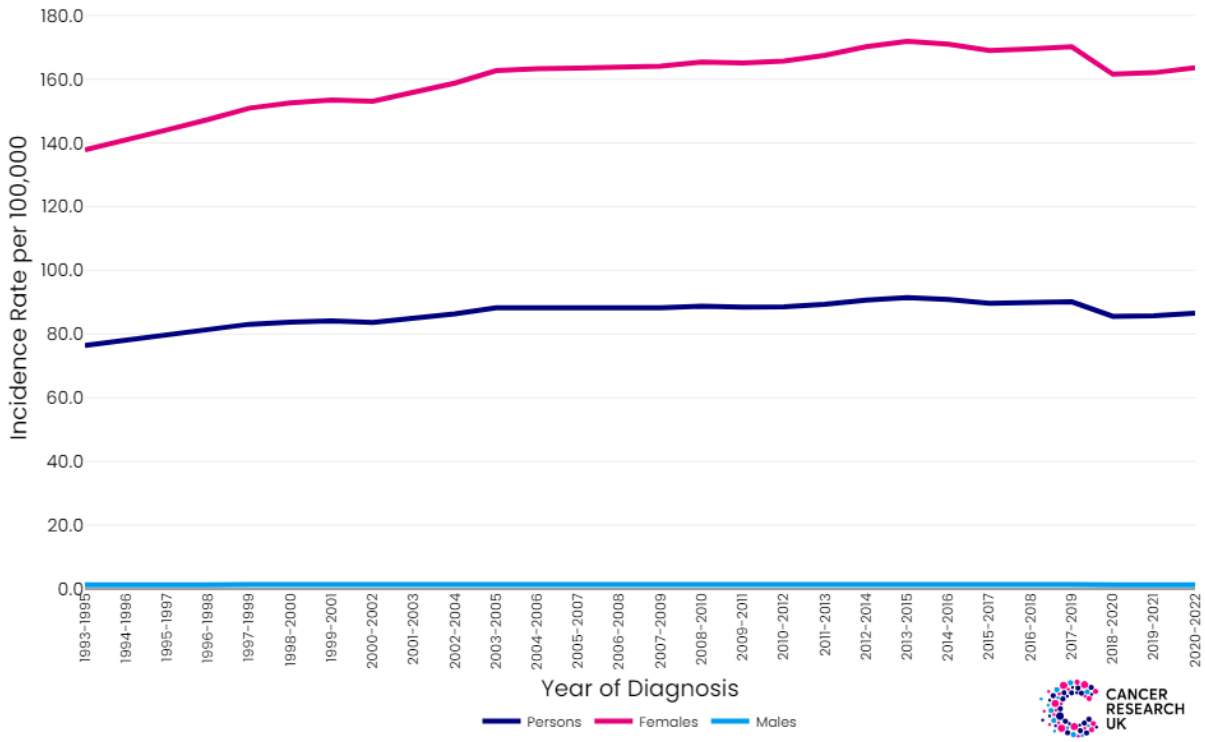
Common cancers

Breast cancer (C50) is the most common cancer overall in the UK, and accounts for 3 in 20 (15%) of all new cases in females and males. It is the most common cancer in females with around 59,000 new female cases every year, however, it is not among the 20 most common cancers in males, with only around 420 new cases (2019, 2021-2022).

While a quarter (25%) of breast cancer cases are in people aged 75 and over, almost a quarter (23%) occur in people aged 65-74, more than a third (36%) in people aged 50-64, and around 3 in 20 (16%) in people aged under 50. Routine breast screening is offered at age 50-70 in the UK, which explains the high proportion of cases in the 50-64 age group.

There has been an increase in breast cancer incidence rates over time, with rates growing by 3% over the past decade to 173 per 100,000 females (Figure 3). The decline in breast cancer diagnoses in 2018-2020 is likely in part due to disruptions to breast cancer screening and diagnostic services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 3: Breast Cancer (C50), European Age-Standardised Incidence Rates per 100,000 Population, UK, 1993-2022

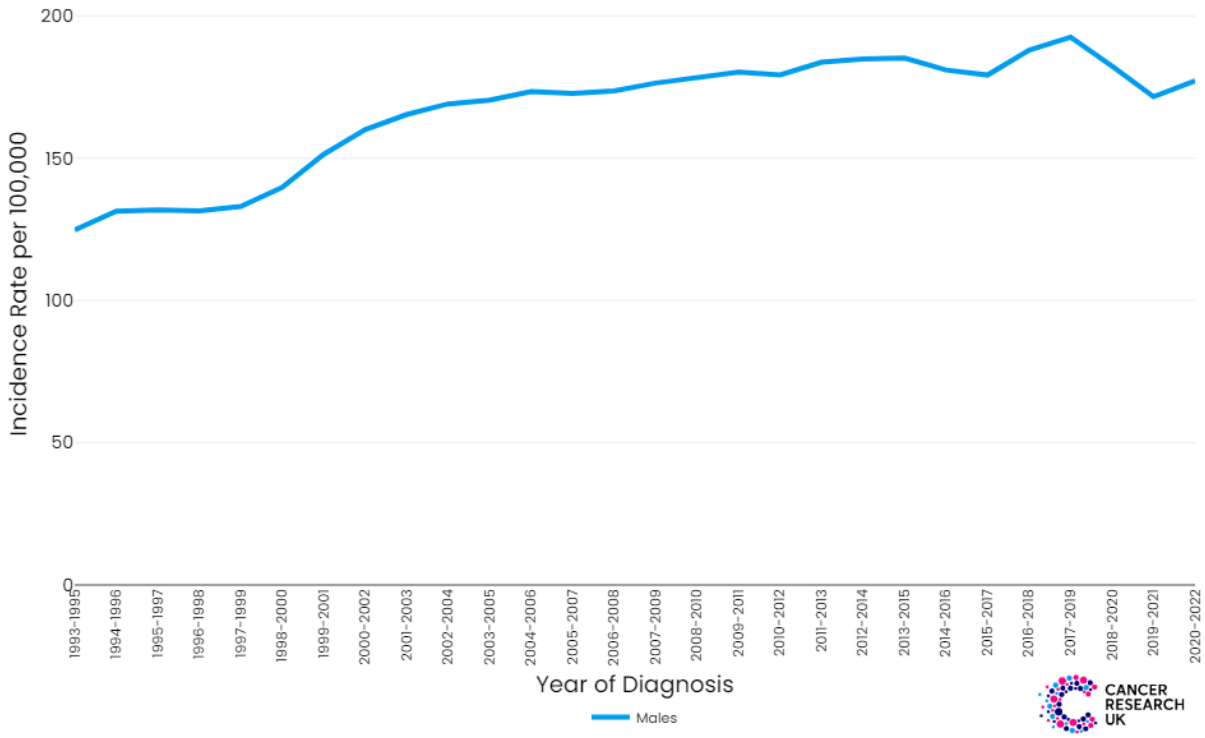


Prostate cancer (C61) is the second most common cancer overall, and the most common for males, accounting for more than a quarter (28%) of all male cancer cases in the UK (2019, 2021-2022). In 2022 specifically, prostate cancer was the most common cancer overall – but to be confident that this is a stable change to the ranking, this needs to be observed consistently over a longer period of time. Increased awareness and use of Prostate-Specific Antigen (PSA) testing could contribute to a temporary increase in incidence as cancers are detected earlier than they may otherwise have been.

Each year more than a third (35%) of prostate cancer cases occur in males aged 75 and over.

There has been an increase in prostate cancer incidence rates over time, with rates growing by around a tenth (7%) over the past decade (Figure 4). The number of prostate cancer cases in 2019, 2021-2022 – 57,900 - was the highest on record in the UK.

Figure 4: Prostate Cancer (C61), European Age-Standardised Incidence Rates per 100,000 Men, UK, 1993-2022

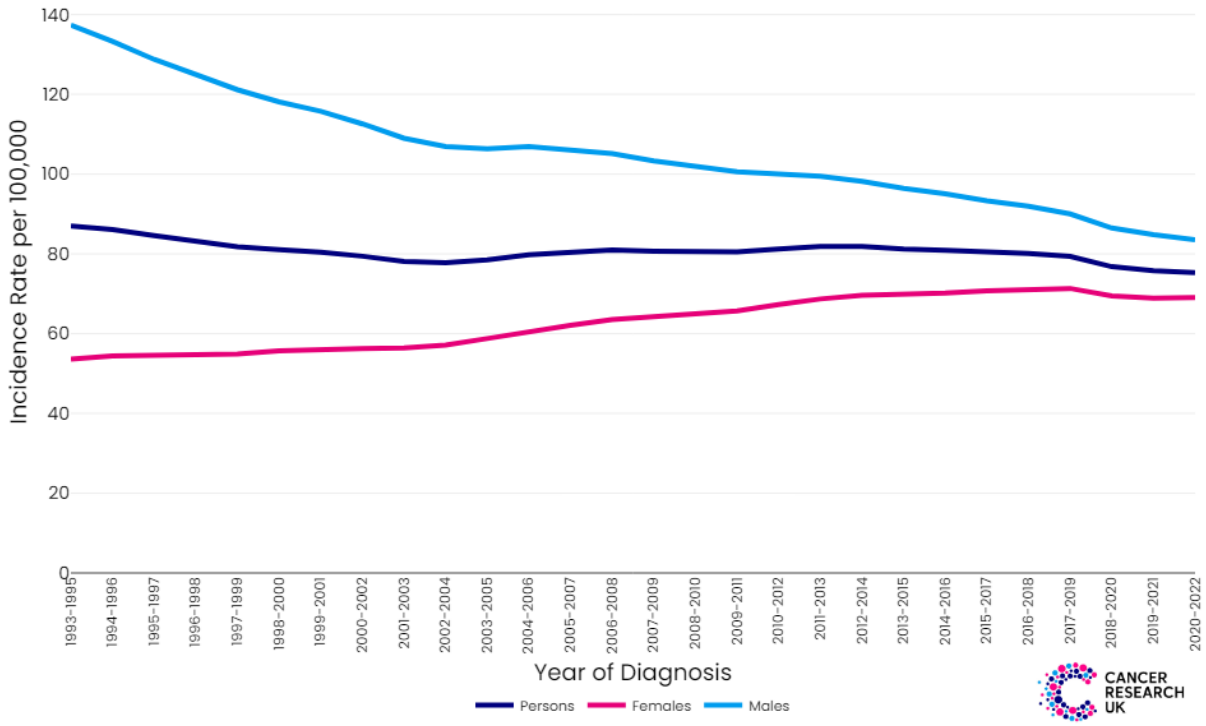


Lung cancer (C33-C34) is the third most common cancer in the UK and accounts for more than a tenth (12%) of all cancer cases (2019, 2021-2022).

Each year almost half (46%) of lung cancer cases are in people aged 75 and over, reflecting both the growing and aging UK population, and the impact of long-term exposure to risk factors such as smoking.

There has been a decrease in lung cancer incidence over time, with rates falling by 5% over the past decade, but this has been driven by falling rates in males (Figure 5). While lung cancer incidence rates are significantly lower in females than in males, rates have fallen by around 14% over the last decade in males but increased by 5% in females. Around 6 in 10 UK lung cancer cases are caused by smoking,[1] and these trends in lung cancer incidence reflect different historical patterns of smoking in males and females. While rates of smoking are higher in males, smoking has declined amongst males consistently from the 1950s onwards, but in contrast female smoking rates remained stable until the early 1970s.[2]

Figure 5: Lung Cancer (C33-C34), European Age-Standardised Incidence Rates per 100,000 Population, UK, 1993-2022



[1] Cancer Research UK, 2024. CRUK analysis brief: Smoking-attributable cancer cases in the UK, 2003-2023. Accessed April 2026.

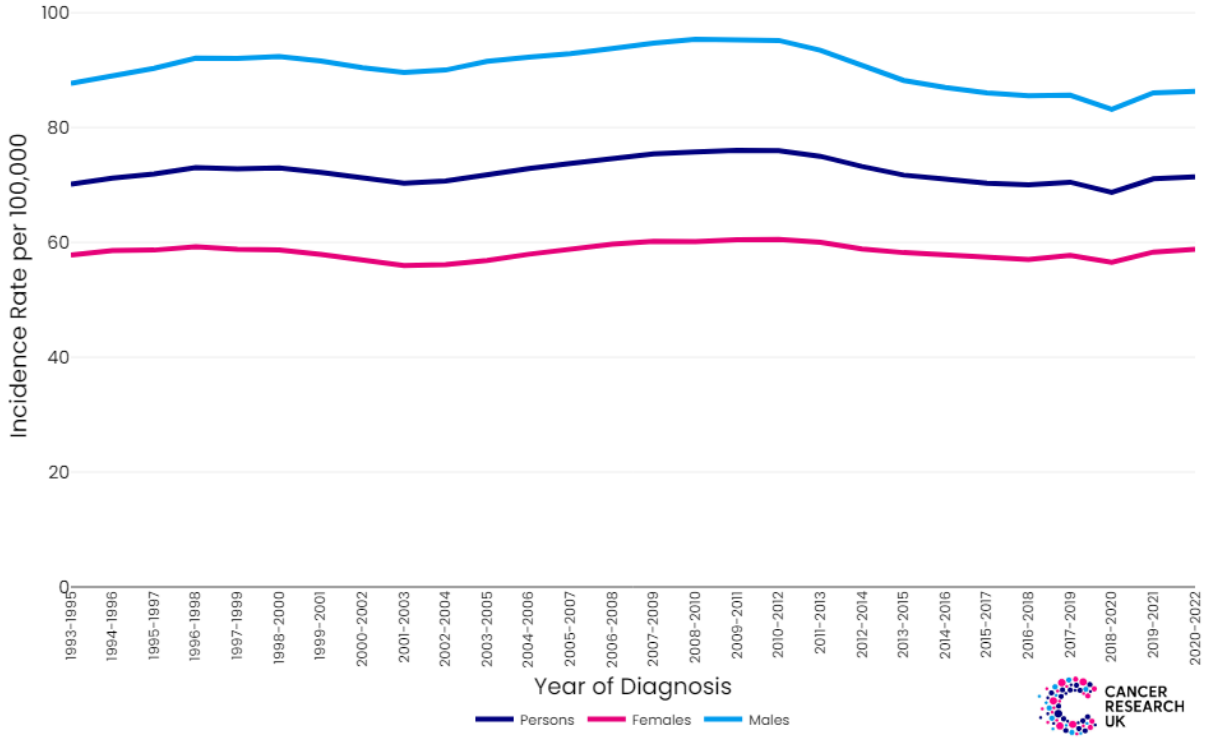
[2] ASH Factsheet: Smoking Statistics. Accessed April 2026.

Bowel cancer (C18-C20) is the fourth most common cancer in the UK, accounting for more than a tenth (12%) of all new cancer cases (2019, 2021-2022).

More than two-fifths (43%) of bowel cancer cases are in people aged 75 and over, but around half (51%) are in people of bowel screening age (50-74 years), and around 5 in 100 (6%) are in people aged under 50.

Overall, there has been a decrease in bowel cancer incidence over time, with rates falling by 3% over the past decade (Figure 6). However, trends vary markedly by age with decreases in incidence for older age groups, and increases in people aged 25-59. Reasons for the increase in younger adults are currently unclear. In older adults the decrease may partly reflect prevention and early diagnosis through screening, where precancerous cell changes are detected and treated before they develop into cancer. Cases may also be diagnosed at a younger age today than they were previously, due to the screening programme.

Figure 6: Bowel Cancer (C18-C20), European Age-Standardised Incidence Rates per 100,000 Population, UK, 1993-2022



Appendix

Table 1: All Cancers Combined (C00-C97, Excl. C44), Annual Average Number of Cases and European Age-Standardised Rates per 100,000 Population, UK, 2019, 2021-2022

		England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland	United Kingdom
Females	**Cases**	162,552	17,762	9,886	5,185	195,384
	Crude Rate	562.8	636.3	623.4	535.8	570.8
	ASR	561.4	594.9	567.2	555.8	564.4
	ASR 95% LCI	559.8	589.8	560.7	547.0	563.0
	ASR 95% UCI	563.0	599.9	573.6	564.5	565.8
Males	**Cases**	174,315	17,825	10,607	5,471	208,217
	Crude Rate	628.2	676.3	696.5	583.9	634.0
	ASR	693.0	701.4	682.9	681.2	692.8
	ASR 95% LCI	691.1	695.4	675.4	670.8	691.1
	ASR 95% UCI	694.9	707.3	690.4	691.7	694.5
Persons	**Cases**	336,866	35,586	20,493	10,656	403,601
	Crude Rate	594.8	655.7	659.2	559.5	601.7
	ASR	618.9	639.7	618.0	610.5	620.4
	ASR 95% LCI	617.7	635.9	613.2	603.8	619.2
	ASR 95% UCI	620.1	643.6	622.9	617.2	621.5