

Breast Cancer

AWARENESS MONTH



Message of The Minister of Health and Wellness

Dr. the Hon. Christopher Tufton, MP

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and we are happy to join the global village as we continue to raise awareness about the impact of breast cancer. This month of observance provides the perfect backdrop for us to show support for women and men affected by breast cancer and to learn of the technological strides being made in breast cancer treatment. Although rare, men can get breast cancer too. Like women, men diagnosed with breast cancer at an early stage have a good chance for a cure.

Breast cancer is among the most common cancers globally and remains the leading cause of cancer-related death among Jamaican women. The Global Cancer Observatory reports that in Jamaica in 2020, there were an estimated 1208 new cases of breast cancer, with an estimated 637 breast cancer deaths. It is estimated that one in 21 Jamaican women will be diagnosed with breast cancer. It is therefore very likely that you or someone you know has been impacted by breast cancer.

Despite global advances in breast cancer screening and management, breast cancer remains a major public health challenge and represents a public health priority in Jamaica. This is why the MOHW knows that we cannot overemphasise the importance of education among our population, and for us to start having the conversation with our young women and men at the secondary & tertiary levels of education, or even earlier.

According to the American Cancer Society in 2021, an estimated 281,550 women and 2,650 men will be diagnosed with invasive breast cancer, and approximately 43,600 women and 530 men are expected to die from the disease. Although incidence rates have increased slightly over the past decade, death rates from breast cancer have been consistently declining over the last three decades, largely due to increased screening rates and improved treatment.

Though for months, COVID 19 has slowed breast cancer screening, we at the MOHW recognise the need to amplify the overarching message, that is, Breast Cancer screening saves lives. It is essential to continue to “press the play button” about the signs and symptoms of breast cancer, risk reduction strategies (such as avoiding obesity and limiting alcohol intake), reducing the stigma associated with breast health that exists in some parts of our country and for all to develop a screening regimen.

Mammography screening is currently considered the most effective way of reducing breast cancer mortality and increasing the odds of survival. Technology has improved greatly, enhancing imaging and exposing tissues to less radiation. It is important for women, particularly those at higher risk for the disease, to follow recommended screening guidelines to detect breast cancer at an early stage when survival rates are highest. For those at average risk, mammography screening starts at age 40. Treatment of the disease typically involves surgery to remove the breast tissue in an effort to prevent spread to other tissues.

The advantage of screening is that it offers a woman, if she develops breast cancer, the opportunity to treat that cancer early when the treatment can be less aggressive and when she has more treatment options. Finding cancer in an early stage may also help to avoid treatment options that can diminish the quality of life. Moreover, breast cancers in women aged 40 to 49 tend to grow faster than breast cancers in older women, which therefore means that mammography and early detection are essential in these women, for the chances of survival to be highest.

Ladies, I am encouraging you to start making healthy lifestyle choices and I also urge you - if you've never had a mammogram, and are age 40 or over, make an appointment during Breast Cancer Awareness Month 2021.

Please visit the MOHW's Non-Communicable Disease and Injury Prevention website- ncdip.moh.gov.jm to assess your risk for breast cancer and get more information.



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