

APR 27 2003 22:00 FR HON HENRY WAXMAN

2022251462 TO 63348

P.03



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Public Health Service

National Institutes of Health
National Cancer Institute
Bethesda, Maryland 20892

The Honorable Henry A. Waxman
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1101

APR 25 2003

Dear Representative Waxman:

Secretary Thompson asked me to reply to your letter about the National Cancer Institute (NCI) Fact Sheet, "Abortion and Breast Cancer." The broad issue of hormonal influence and breast cancer risk over a woman's course of life is currently a major topic of interest for both the NCI and the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

I assure you that the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is committed to disseminating scientific-based information in an unbiased manner to promote and protect the health of women. Knowledge about the risk factors associated with developing cancer is very important to the American public, and we strive to provide accurate and up-to-date information based on the best scientific evidence available.

For this reason, the NCI sponsored a workshop on "Early Reproductive Events and Breast Cancer Risk," held in February 2003. This workshop reviewed what we know about epidemiological, biological, molecular, and endocrine relationships to reproduction and breast cancer risk using scientific information to help understand the mechanisms that cause cancer. While this workshop had a broader focus, some of the findings from this workshop have been used to revise the fact sheet, which has been posted and is called "Abortion, Miscarriage, and Breast Cancer Risk." A copy of this revised fact sheet is enclosed. It provides background information, a summary of current knowledge about risk factors, and a statement of NCI's commitment to the continuing investigation of hormonal influences on breast cancer risk. As with all of the public health information that we disseminate, we will strive to continue to provide the most up-to-date scientific information as new evidence and questions arise.

Thank you for your letter. I am sending a similar reply to each of your colleagues who co-signed the letter.

Sincerely,

Andrew C. von Eschenbach, M.D.

Director

National Cancer Institute

Enclosure

Fact Sheet 3.75



Cancer Facts

[CIS Home](#)
[Cancer.gov](#)
[Dictionary](#)
[Search](#)

Date reviewed: 03/21/2003

Abortion, Miscarriage, and Breast Cancer Risk

Introduction

A woman's hormone levels normally change throughout her life for a variety of reasons, and these hormonal changes can lead to changes in her breasts. Many such hormonal changes occur during pregnancy, changes that may influence a woman's chances of developing breast cancer later in life. As a result, over several decades a considerable amount of research has been and continues to be conducted to determine whether having an induced abortion, or a miscarriage (also known as spontaneous abortion), influences a woman's chances of developing breast cancer later in life.

Current Knowledge

In February 2003, the National Cancer Institute (NCI) convened a workshop of over 100 of the world's leading experts who study pregnancy and breast cancer risk. Workshop participants reviewed existing population-based, clinical, and animal studies on the relationship between pregnancy and breast cancer risk, including studies of induced and spontaneous abortions. They concluded that having an abortion or miscarriage does not increase a woman's subsequent risk of developing breast cancer. A summary of their findings, titled *Summary Report: Early Reproductive Events and Breast Cancer Workshop*, can be found at <http://www.cancer.gov/cancerinfo/ere-workshop-report>.

Related NCI Materials

- *Pregnancy and Breast Cancer Risk fact sheet (currently in preparation; anticipated release date: May 1, 2003)*
- *What You Need To Know About™ Breast Cancer*
<http://cancer.gov/cancerinfo/wyntk/breast>

Background

The relationship between induced and spontaneous abortion and breast cancer risk has been the subject of extensive research beginning in the late 1950s. Until the mid-1990s, the evidence was inconsistent. Findings from some studies suggested there was no increase in risk of breast cancer among women who had had an abortion, while findings from other studies suggested there was an increased risk. Most of these studies, however, were flawed in a number of ways that can lead to unreliable results. Only a small

studies have been conducted. These newer studies examined large numbers of women, collected data before breast cancer was found, and gathered medical history information from medical records rather than simply from self-reports, thereby generating more reliable findings. The newer studies consistently showed no association between induced and spontaneous abortions and breast cancer risk.

Ongoing Research Supported by the National Cancer Institute

Basic, clinical, and population research will continue to be supported which investigate the relationship and the mechanisms of how hormones in general and during pregnancy influence the development of breast cancer.

Important Information About Breast Cancer Risk Factors

At present, the factors known to increase a woman's chance of developing breast cancer include age (a woman's chances of getting breast cancer increase as she gets older), a family history of breast cancer, an early age at first menstrual period, a late age at menopause, a late age at the time of birth of her first full-term baby, and certain breast conditions. Obesity is also a risk factor for breast cancer in postmenopausal women. More information about breast cancer risk factors is found in NCI's publication *What You Need To Know About™ Breast Cancer*.

Important Information About Identifying Breast Cancer

NCI recommends that, beginning in their 40s, women receive mammography screening every year or two. Women who have a higher than average risk of breast cancer (for example, women with a family history of breast cancer) should seek expert medical advice about whether they should be screened before age 40, and how frequently they should be screened.

###

Sources of National Cancer Institute Information

Cancer Information Service

Toll-free: 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237)

TTY (for deaf and hard of hearing callers): 1-800-332-8615

NCI Online

Internet

Use <http://cancer.gov/> to reach NCI's Web site.

LiveHelp

Cancer Information Specialists offer online assistance through the *LiveHelp* link on the NCI's Web site.