

X-Rays Cause "Hundreds of Extra Cancers" Per Year

British researchers say the use of x-rays to aid diagnosis causes hundreds of extra cancers each year in the U.K. Researchers from Oxford University and Cancer Research UK said their findings indicate that about 0.6% of total cancer risk may be due to exposure to x-rays in hospitals.

In the US, approximately 0.9% of cancers were due to diagnostic x-rays, in Germany, 1.3%, and the highest, at 2.9% in Japan, causing more than 7,500 cases a year. In the UK, studies have suggested that up to 30% of chest x-rays are not medically necessary. Even fewer CT body scans were deemed necessary. "A general goal must be to avoid unnecessary x-ray procedures," said Dr Peter Herzog of Ludwig Maximilians University in Munich said. "Unnecessary CT examinations can lengthen hospital stay as well as causing radiation exposure." "In everyday practice, those ordering radiological procedures should think carefully about the benefit for and the risk to their patients for each examination," Herzog said. Worldwide, researchers say x-rays account for approximately 14% of the general population's exposure to radiation from both man-made and natural sources. The cancer risk from cumulative radiation exposure can be quantified using data taken from those exposed to radiation after the 1945 atomic bomb blasts at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The study was published in the Lancet medical journal.

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