

NOT TO BE MADE PUBLIC BEFORE MONDAY SEPTEMBER 21

SURVEY REVEALS A COMBINATION OF LOW AWARENESS OF SYMPTOMS AND IMPACT OF COVID-19 IS CREATING A TICKING TIME BOMB FOR LATE DIAGNOSIS OF HEAD AND NECK CANCER

- General public both unaware of symptoms and reluctant to seek medical advice; COVID-19 compounding issue, with people less likely to visit a doctor
- The survey included over 5,700 people across 5 countries (Germany, Italy, Poland, Portugal and Turkey)
- Survey results coincide with the beginning of the *Make Sense* campaign's annual head and neck cancer awareness week, taking place September 21–25 across Europe

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21: A new survey initiated by the European Head and Neck Society (EHNS), as part of their *Make Sense* campaign, and the European Cancer Patient Coalition (ECPC), conducted by YouGov, has uncovered concerning evidence that Europeans do not know the signs and symptoms of head and neck cancer nor when to seek timely medical advice. The COVID-19 pandemic is further exacerbating the problem and creating a perfect storm for late diagnosis, with nearly 30% of respondents less likely to visit a healthcare professional because of the pandemic.

The sixth most common type of cancer in Europe, head and neck cancer has a devastating impact on those affected and has a poor survival rate, due to the disease often being diagnosed late; in 60% of cases the disease has already progressed by time of diagnosis. Meanwhile, 80–90% of head and neck cancer patients diagnosed and treated in the early stages survive.

The results come at the start of the 8th annual head and neck cancer awareness week, taking place September 21–25, during which the *Make Sense* campaign is encouraging the general public to learn the signs and symptoms and seek early medical advice, via this year's slogan 'Stay head and neck cancer aware: don't delay, seek medical advice today.'

"When caught early, head and neck cancer has a good prognosis and can be curable," said Professor René Leemans, Chair of the *Make Sense* campaign and of the Department of Otolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery at the Amsterdam University Medical Center. "The results showing that COVID-19 has left people less likely to visit their GP is really concerning and an added burden for a disease that is already often caught later than it should be. It is so important that people, especially men over the age of 40 who are particularly at risk, follow the '1for3' rule and know when to visit a healthcare professional – it could save your life."

The *Make Sense* campaign's '1for3' rule was developed by leading experts in head and neck cancer, and states if you experience any one symptom of head and neck cancer for three weeks or longer, you should visit a healthcare professional. Symptoms of head and neck cancer to look out for include: a lump in the neck, pain when swallowing, persistent hoarseness, white/red patches in the mouth, an unpleasant taste in the mouth, frequent nose bleeds, pain in the throat, face, jaw or ear, and a persistent blocked nose.

While an improvement in general awareness of the disease has been seen compared to a survey completed ten years ago, the survey results demonstrate there is a critical need to continue education around head and neck cancer. 73% of respondents admitted they do not confidently know the disease's symptoms, and 38% had not even heard of head and neck cancer.

When presented with a list of potential symptoms, whilst 58% of respondents – the highest response – correctly identified a lump in the neck as a symptom, only 12% recognised a persistent blocked nose

as a potential sign of head and neck cancer. Across a list of symptoms, on average only 45% of respondents would visit a healthcare professional should they experience one of the symptoms for three weeks – despite this being the course of action endorsed by medical experts.

The survey also reveals an alarmingly low awareness of factors that might put them at higher risk of developing head and neck cancer. Smoking (57%) and drinking alcohol (31%) were relatively poorly identified as risk factors, despite being the top causes of head and neck cancer. Despite the incidence of HPV-related head and neck cancer increasing, particularly affecting younger people, only 21% identified HPV (Human Papillomavirus, a viral infection passed on through skin to skin contact) as a risk factor. Only 5% of respondents recognised gender as having an impact; men are two to three times more likely to get head and neck cancer than women.

“Rates of head and neck cancer are growing year-on-year, and the insight that Europeans aren’t aware of the factors that are putting them at higher risk is deeply troubling,” said Antonella Cardone, Director of ECPC. “Further measures on tobacco smoke prevention and alcohol abuse, as well as the adoption of gender-neutral HPV vaccination across Europe, should be a top priority for policy makers.”

On Tuesday, the *Make Sense* campaign will also be releasing a Head and Neck Cancer White Paper, calling for significant changes to be adopted at a European policy level to improve the standard of care for head and neck cancer. Activities are also planned across Europe and on social media. To find out more about what is happening in your area, visit <https://makesensecampaign.eu/>, and the Campaign’s [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) channels.

The survey was undertaken for the *Make Sense* campaign by YouGov between 16–23 June. A total of 5,725 adults in five countries (Poland, Turkey, Germany, Italy and Portugal) participated in the survey.

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About the survey

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 5,725 Polish, Turkish, German, Italian and Portuguese adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 16th - 23rd June 2020. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all Polish, Turkish, German, Italian and Portuguese adults (aged 18+).

About Head and Neck Cancer

Head and neck cancer is a way of describing any cancer that is found in the head or neck region, including the inside of the mouth and tongue ('oral cavity'), the throat ('pharynx') and the voice box ('larynx') and excluding the eyes, brain, ears or oesophagus. This type of cancer usually begins in the squamous cells that line the moist, mucosal surfaces inside the head and neck: for example, inside the mouth, nose and throat.

About the *Make Sense* Campaign

The *Make Sense* campaign, run by the European Head and Neck Society (EHNS), aims to raise awareness of head and neck cancer and ultimately improve outcomes for patients with the disease. It will do this through:

- Education on disease prevention
- Driving understanding of the signs and symptoms of the disease
- Encouraging earlier presentation, diagnosis and referral

The *Make Sense* campaign is supported by Bristol Myers Squibb, Debiopharm, Merck, MSD and Pfizer. More information about the campaign is available at <https://makesensecampaign.eu/>, on [Twitter](#) and on [Facebook](#).

About the EHNS

The European Head and Neck Society (EHNS) is an international non-profit association based in Belgium. The EHNS is composed of individuals, national and multinational societies, and associated study groups oriented towards head and neck cancer research, training and treatment throughout Europe. Individuals from the rest of the world are also welcome to apply for membership. The intent of the EHNS is to promote exchange of knowledge in all aspects of head and neck neoplastic diseases and to promote the highest standards of research, education and training, disease prevention and patient care. For more information on the society, please visit: <http://www.ehns.org>.

About the European Cancer Patient Coalition

[European Cancer Patient Coalition \(ECPC\)](#) is the voice of cancer patients in Europe. With over 450 members, ECPC is Europe's largest umbrella cancer patients' association, covering all 28 EU member states and many other European and non-European countries. ECPC represents patients affected by all types of cancers, from the rarest to the most common.