

PRESS RELEASE

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Zagreb University School of Medicine
Šalata 3b
10000 Zagreb
Croatia

Phone: ++385-1-4590-254

Fax: ++385-1-4590-222

Mail: dario.sambunjak@mef.hr

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No increase in cancer rates in the vicinity of Slovenian nuclear power plant

ZAGREB – In Brežice municipality in southeastern Slovenia, cancer risk has increased since 1970, but this increase can not be ascribed to ionizing radiation of the nearby Krško Nuclear Power Plant, opened in 1984, claim the Slovenian epidemiologists in a study published in the new issue of *Croatian Medical Journal*.

From 1970 to 1983 in Brežice municipality there were on average 22 cancer cases annually (88/100.000 inhabitants), and this number grew to 40 (161/100.000 inhabitants) in the period of 1984-2003. However, similar increase also occurred in other parts of Slovenia, so that the standardized incidence ratio for all cancers combined in Brežice was below the national and regional average. Risk for colorectal and cervical cancer was above this average, but these two types of malignant diseases are not usually associated with radiation. Radiation can cause thyroid cancer and leukemias, but the risk of these cancers was comparable with Slovenian average both in period before the opening of Krško Nuclear Power Plant and after it.

General increase in the number of cancers can be explained by aging of population.

According to the Slovenian population censuses for 1971 and 2002, the number of inhabitants in Brežice municipality older than 65 years increased almost for one third in 2002, but the

number of inhabitants older than 75 years doubled in 2002. Colorectal cancer, which is relatively more frequent in Brežice municipality than in the rest of Slovenia, is associated with the so called western life-style, with fat-rich and fiber poor diet, misuse of alcohol, smoking and lack of exercise. A recent national study showed that unhealthy eating habits are particularly prevalent in southeastern Slovenia.

Correspondence to:

Vesna Zadnik

Epidemiology and Cancer Registry

Institute of Oncology Ljubljana

Zaloška 2

1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia

vzadnik@onko-i.si