

<https://doi.org/10.29289/25945394V36S11003>

1003 – Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on breast cancer mortality rates: a temporal analysis from 2020 to 2024

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Introduction/Justification: The COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted oncology screening and care. This study evaluates the impact of the pandemic on breast cancer diagnostic staging and waiting times for initial treatment among Brazilian women.

Methods: A retrospective ecological study was conducted using public data from the Brazilian Ministry of Health (DATASUS, INCA Hospital Cancer Registry – RHC, and Oncology Panel). Extracted data included female population estimates and breast cancer mortality (2015–2024), clinical staging of analytical cases (2015–2023), and time to first treatment (2021–2024). AI tools (Gemini) were used exclusively for mathematical percentage calculations and English translation.

Results: Between 2015 and 2024, 179,917 deaths from breast cancer were recorded. Analysis of the INCA RHC database revealed that the proportion of advanced-stage diagnoses (Stages III and IV) rose from 28.6% in the pre-pandemic period (2015–2019) to 30.6% during and after the peak of the pandemic (2020–2023). Furthermore, regarding the 60-day legal limit for starting treatment, the Oncology Panel data showed that 46.1% of patients waited more than 60 days for their first oncological treatment in 2021, compared to 55.4% in 2024.

Conclusion: The pandemic period was associated with a higher proportion of late-stage breast cancer diagnoses and significant, progressive delays in treatment. These findings highlight a critical bottleneck in the public health system and the urgent need for strategic policies to reduce the accumulated pent-up demand for oncological care.

Ethics: Public data.

Keywords: breast neoplasms; COVID-19; Epidemiology; delayed diagnosis; time-to-treatment.