



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on November 18, 2011

## Study Ties Birth Control Pills to Prostate Cancer

Explained Dr. Neil Fleshner, head of urology at the University Health Network in Ontario and one of the study's authors: "There's reason to suggest there's an environmental component [to prostate cancer] and not solely genetic."

While other studies have linked prostate and other cancers to the presence of pesticides, chemicals, and medications in water supplies, researchers explained that their speculation is based on the increase of prostate cancer in developed countries during the four decades that has seen a dramatic rise in the use of oral contraceptives by women in those countries.



Reported [Medical News Today](#): "In order to determine prostate cancer rates, deaths as well as the ratio of women using common methods for contraception for 2007, the investigators used data from the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) and the United Nations World Contraceptive Use report. The data was then examined for individual nations and continents worldwide in order to determine if there was any association between women using the contraceptive pill and illness and death caused by prostate cancer."

While researchers found no link between non-medicinal contraception and increased prostate cancer rates, "in the population as a whole irrespective of the wealth of a nation, the use of the contraceptive pill in individual countries around the world was substantially linked to both the number of new prostate cancer cases and deaths from prostate cancer," reported *Medical News Today*.

The authors of the study emphasized that their research is speculative, and is meant to generate further research into a possible cause-and-effect relationship between the increased use of oral contraception by women and the increase in prostate cancer among men.

Nonetheless, the study does add to the debate that has been raging of late concerning the overall safety of medicinal contraception. For example, in September the [Wall Street Journal](#) reported on new concerns by the Food and Drug Administration that certain types of birth control pills may raise the risk of blood clots in women who take them.

In a drug safety memo posted on its website September 27, reported the *Journal*, "the FDA said preliminary results of an agency-funded study involving 800,000 women suggest about a 1.5-fold increase in the risk of blood clots for women who use drospirenone-containing birth-control pills, compared to users of other hormonal contraceptives." Drospirenone, which is a type of female sex hormone called a progestin, is an ingredient in the pills Yaz and Yasmin, distributed by Bayer AG.

While all major forms of birth control pills increase the risk of blood clots, the European Medicines Agency warned that the risk of blood clots from oral contraceptives containing drospirenone was higher than for pills containing the other common ingredient, levonorgestrel, another synthetic progestin.



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More ominous is the well-known link between oral contraception and breast cancer. As reported five years ago by [WebMD.com](#), at least a score of studies found that women who use oral contraceptives face “a slightly increased risk of developing breast cancer early in life, with the risk being greatest for women who use oral birth control before they have their first child..”



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