# Concerns grow over health risks from historical pregnancy drug DES



Concerns surrounding the historical use of a pregnancy drug known as diethylstilbestrol (DES) have intensified following an investigation that revealed that more than 100 women believe their health has deteriorated as a result of exposure to the medication. This drug, often referred to as a "hidden thalidomide," was prescribed to hundreds of thousands of expectant and new mothers between the 1930s and 1973 for various complications, including the drying up of breast milk.

DES is a synthetic form of the hormone oestrogen, and the implications of its use have prompted fears of severe health consequences among those who ingested it—including rare forms of cancer. A notable voice in this issue is Consultant Urogynecologist Dr. Wael Agur, who has treated patients linked to DES. Dr. Agur stated in an interview with ITV Tonight that "this drug increases the risk of breast cancer in the women who took it." He added, "People call it the hidden thalidomide, because it is there, we know it is there, but we don't know the size of the problem."

One family particularly affected by the drug's legacy is that of Jan Hall, a 75-year-old resident of Bournemouth. Hall believes that the health issues experienced by her family can be traced back to her mother, Rita Milburn, who was prescribed DES during her pregnancies. Milburn tragically passed away from breast cancer at the young age of 32. In her own health journey, Jan Hall was diagnosed with cervical cancer in her 20s. Furthermore, her daughters have also faced health challenges, including abnormal smear tests and pre-cancerous cell developments.

The troubling legacy of DES has led to renewed calls for comprehensive screenings for those who may have been exposed to the drug, as they are believed to be at an elevated risk of developing reproductive system cancers. The Mirror has reported that there is increasing urgency surrounding this issue, as more women potentially impacted by DES may come forward in light of these findings.

In response to the allegations concerning DES, a spokesperson from the Department of Health and Social Care expressed sympathy for those affected, stating, "Our sympathies are with anyone harmed by the historic use of DES. We will continue to explore what support can be offered to those impacted by the use of it." The inquiry into the drug's long-term effects continues, as both medical professionals and patients seek clarity on the potential health risks associated with DES exposure.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/causes-prevention/risk/hormones/des-fact-sheet> - This URL supports the historical use of DES as a synthetic estrogen prescribed to pregnant women and its link to increased risks of certain cancers, including clear cell adenocarcinoma and breast cancer.
* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diethylstilbestrol> - Wikipedia provides a comprehensive overview of DES, including its historical use in pregnancy, its effects on health, and its classification as a nonsteroidal estrogen.
* <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/16096877/> - This PubMed article discusses the long-term health implications of DES exposure, including increased risks of breast cancer and reproductive anomalies.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-> - Unable to find specific BBC coverage corroborating the exact claims. However, the BBC often reports on historical drug issues, so similar topics might be covered.
* <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/health/> - The Mirror has covered various health stories related to historical medical practices and drug impacts, which might support concerns about DES.