# Concerns rise over health risks linked to diethylstilbestrol



Evidence has emerged highlighting potential health risks associated with diethylstilbestrol (DES), a synthetic oestrogen prescribed to expectant mothers from the 1930s until 1973. An investigation by ITV News has unveiled concerns from over 100 women who believe their health has been adversely affected by the drug, which has drawn comparisons to thalidomide, a controversial medication infamous for its severe side effects.

DES was historically administered to approximately 300,000 women, primarily to address various pregnancy complications, including the drying of breast milk. With reports of severe pain and rare forms of cancer surfacing from those who took the drug, there is apprehension that even larger numbers of women may come forward with similar experiences.

Consultant Urogynecologist Dr Wael Agur, who has experience treating women exposed to DES, informed ITV Tonight, "This drug increases the risk of breast cancer in the women who took it. 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."

Among those affected is Jan Hall, 75, from Bournemouth, who has called for an urgent enquiry into the drug's repercussions. She believes that three generations of her family may have endured health issues linked to DES exposure. Hall's mother, Rita Milburn, was prescribed the drug during her pregnancies and tragically succumbed to breast cancer at the young age of 32. Jan herself faced a cervical cancer diagnosis in her 20s, and her daughters have reportedly experienced abnormal smear tests and the presence of pre-cancerous cells.

Currently, there are growing calls for health screenings for those who were exposed to DES, as they are considered to be at an elevated risk for reproductive system cancers. A spokesperson for the Department of Health and Social Care expressed empathy for those affected by the historical use of DES, 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."

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

## References

* <https://dceg.cancer.gov/research/what-we-study/des-study> - This URL provides detailed information on the long-term health effects of DES exposure, including increased risks of breast cancer in mothers and various reproductive complications in their offspring.
* <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/26532/cdc_26532_DS1.pdf> - The CDC's DES Update Fact Sheet outlines the confirmed health risks associated with DES exposure, such as a higher risk of breast cancer in mothers and increased risks of clear-cell adenocarcinoma in daughters.
* <https://coolspringsobgyn.com/des-exposure-in-women-and-lifelong-risk/> - This webpage explains the impact of DES on women's health, including heightened breast cancer risks for mothers and reproductive issues for daughters.
* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diethylstilbestrol> - This encyclopedia entry provides historical background and health effects related to DES, echoing the comparisons with thalidomide due to severe side effects.
* <https://www.breastcancer.org/risk/factors/des> - This webpage from Breastcancer.org discusses the relationship between DES exposure and breast cancer risks, supporting the claim of increased risk.