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WASHINGTON **Study links abortion, breast cancer risk**

In a seven-year study of some 1,800 women in the Seattle area, researchers also found women under 18 years of age who had abortions increased their risk of breast cancer by 150 per cent, while women over 30 increased their risk by as much as 110 per cent.

In a study to be published in the November issue of the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, researchers at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle found induced abortion was associated with a 50-per-cent increased risk of breast cancer.

The increased risk did not vary with the number of induced abortions a woman had had, or with a history of having also had a completed pregnancy.

For the younger women, the risk was higher if the abortion was performed after eight weeks of gestation or if the woman had a family history of breast cancer.

Women under age 45 who have abortions could have a 50-per-cent higher risk of developing breast cancer than other women in that age group, researchers reported Wednesday.

No increased breast-cancer risk was associated with spontaneous abortion or miscarriage, the study said.

One of the study's authors, Dr. Noel Weiss, said the suspected link between abortion and breast cancer is the proliferation of breast tissue early in pregnancy.

"The concern is that induced abortion, especially toward the end of the first trimester of pregnancy, might leave a woman with (breast) cells that are developed to a certain degree but not fully, and those cells might be more prone to develop cancer later in life," Weiss said in a telephone interview.

Weiss concurred with an editorial in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* that called for more research into the problem.

However, both the editorial and Weiss noted even a 50-per-cent increase in risk is slight in the context of this kind of study.

This is because the results of epidemiologic studies may have been due to a variety of factors, including bias, rather than being specifically caused by one factor, such as induced abortion.

Weiss added he does not see a reason for great public alarm about the study results.

"I personally would not be alarmed because I know that this study will need to be replicated and may not necessarily reflect the true state of affairs," said Weiss.

The study was funded by the United States National Cancer Institute.

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REFERENCE: Daling, J.R., Malone, K.E., Voigt, L.F., White, E. and N.S. Weiss: Risk of breast cancer among young women: relationship to induced abortion. *J. Natl. Cancer Inst.* **86**(#21): 1,584-1,592 (1994); see also the editorial on pages 1,569-1,570: Rosenberg, L.: Induced abortion and breast cancer: more scientific data are needed. [DC Library call number: PER RC261.U47]

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