



Health statistics

Atlas on mortality in the European Union

Chapter 15 Prostate cancer

Data 1994–96

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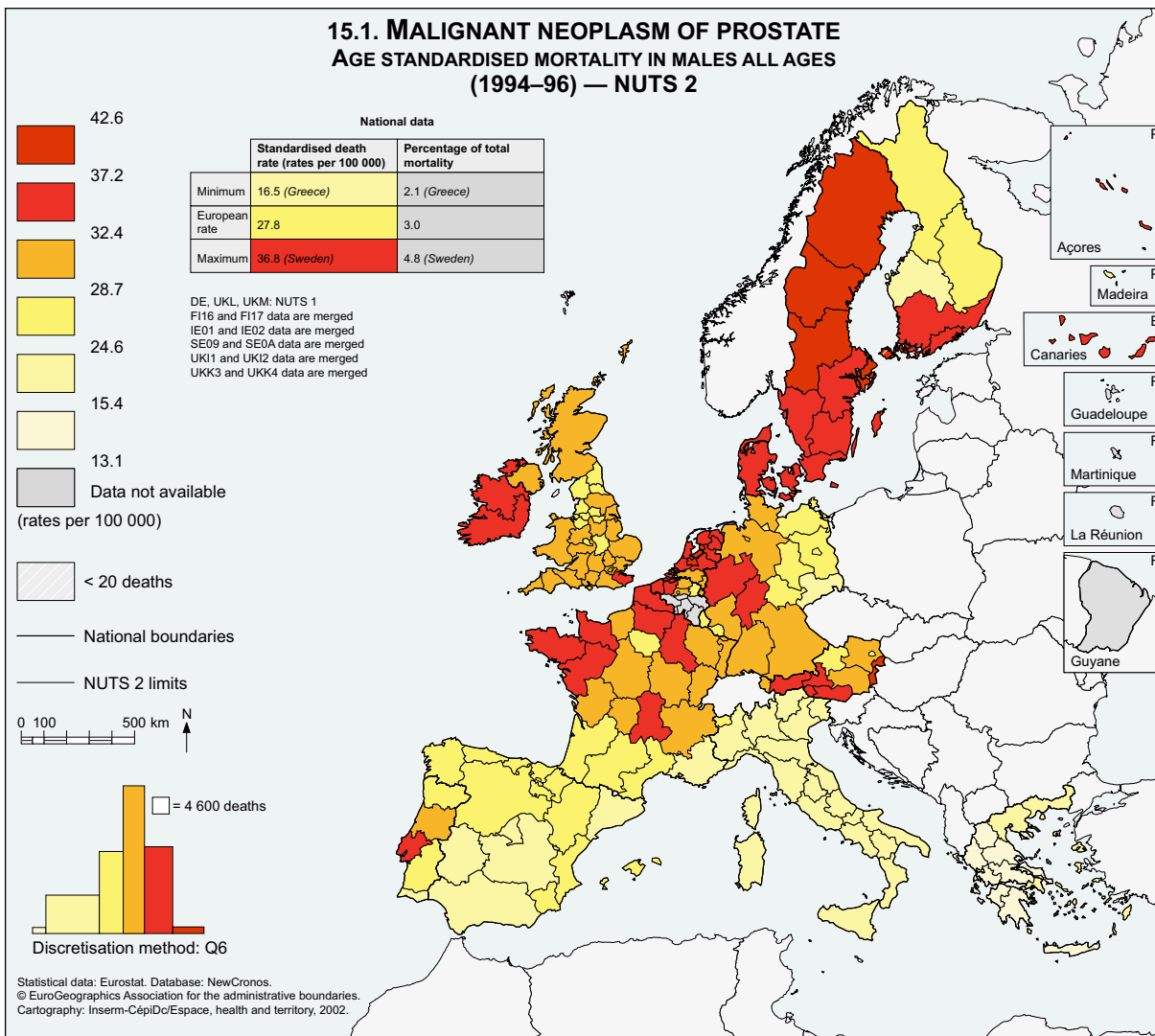
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15. Prostate cancer

Prostate cancer affects older men: nine out of 10 deaths occur after 65 years.

Its impact on male mortality (3 % of deaths) is relatively small compared with other cancers. However, it could become a major public health problem in view of the ageing of the population. Furthermore, advances made in screening for this cancer since the 1980s have led to a considerable rise in the number of cases diagnosed.

Major contrasts

Mortality rates from prostate cancer in Europe vary at a ratio of 1 to 3 depending on the region.

Sweden seems to be the worst affected country, while Greece has the lowest rates.

For the EU as a whole, there is a contrast between Mediterranean regions with below-average mortality and the other Member States, where there are several centres of excess mortality: the west of the Flemish part of Belgium, Denmark, western Germany, north and north-west France, Ireland, the Netherlands and Alpine Austria.

The regions containing the capitals, except Vale do Tejo, have generally low rates even if the regional groupings in which they are situated have high rates (Île-de-France, Wien, Hamburg).

The most clearly identified risk factors for prostate cancer are fatty foods, exposure to cadmium, and sexually transmitted viral infections. However, these factors would seem to produce only a slight increase in the risk of cancer and do not easily explain the geographical pattern observed.

In addition, the geographical disparities do not necessarily reflect the actual impact of these cancers in the various European regions. This disease, which develops slowly, causes death at an advanced age where the level of co-morbidity is high.

Furthermore, there may be differences between Member States in certification practices. In some

cases, prostate cancer may not appear as the initial cause of death even though it is a major contributory factor. It may also be declared as a metastatic cancer without any more precise description. The analysis of regional disparities must therefore take account of these potential problems of data comparability.