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## Fact Sheet: Early stage breast cancer in Australia

### Early stage breast cancer

- Breast cancer is a disease in which abnormal cells in the breast tissues multiply out of control forming an invasive (or malignant) tumour which can spread to other parts of the body.<sup>1</sup>
- Early stage breast cancer is cancer that is contained in the breast and may or may not have spread to lymph nodes (glands in the body) in the armpit.<sup>1</sup> Some cancer cells may have spread outside the breast and armpit area but cannot be detected.<sup>2</sup>
- Early stage node negative breast cancer refers to cancer that has not spread to the lymph nodes.<sup>3</sup>
  - On average approximately a third (30 percent) of women diagnosed will have node positive breast cancer.<sup>3</sup>
- Breast cancers are 'staged' according to how advanced they are. Early breast cancer may be called Stage I, Stage IIA, Stage IIB and Stage IIIA.<sup>2</sup> The below table describes the stages of early breast cancer.<sup>2,4-5</sup>

Stages of Early Breast Cancer		
Stage	Size of the cancer	Have cancer cells been found in the lymph nodes?
Stage I*	< 2 cm	No (node negative)
Stage IIA*	No cancer found in the breast	Yes (node positive)
	< 2 cm	Yes (node positive)
	2–5 cm	No (node negative)
Stage IIB*	2–5 cm	Yes (node positive)
	>5cm	No (node negative)
Stage IIIA**	No cancer is found in the breast	Yes (node positive)
	<5cm	Yes (node positive)
	>5cm	Yes (node positive)

\*Sourced from:

- National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre. *Guide for women with early breast cancer*. 2008.
- NSW Breast Cancer Institute. *Breast cancer treatment protocol on TNM Staging*. August 2009
- U.S. department of health and human services, National Cancer Institute. *Surgery choices for women with early stage breast cancer*. August 2004

\*\*Sourced from the U.S. department of health and human services, National Cancer Institute. *Surgery choices for women with early stage breast cancer*. August 2004

## Breast cancer in Australia

- On average one in nine Australia women will develop breast cancer and tragically one in 38 will die from it before the age of 85 years.<sup>6</sup>
- Breast cancer is the most common form of cancer affecting Australian women aged 34-75 years.<sup>7</sup> and is the second largest cause of cancer death in women.<sup>7</sup>
- There has been an increasing trend in the number of breast cancer cases in Australia women. Over a 25-year period from 1982\* to 2006 the number of breast cancer cases in Australia more than doubled.<sup>6</sup>
- Australian Government projections predict the number of women diagnosed with breast cancer will increase to 15,440 cases each year by 2015. This equates to 42 women being diagnosed with breast cancer every day in 2015.<sup>6</sup>

## Treatment of early stage breast cancer

- The aim of treatment for early breast cancer is to remove the breast cancer and destroy any cancer cells that may be left in the breast, armpit or other parts of the body but cannot be detected.<sup>1,2</sup>
- Most women with early breast cancer undergo surgery to remove the cancer. Following breast surgery many women received additional treatments such as:
  - Radiotherapy – uses x-rays to kill or slow the growth of cancer cells.<sup>1,2</sup>
  - Chemotherapy – involves using one or more drugs to kill cancer cells that may have spread outside the breast and armpit area to other parts of the body but cannot be detected.<sup>1,2</sup>
  - Hormone therapies (also called endocrine therapy) – to interfere with female hormones in the body (estrogen or progesterone). This treatment is for people who have cancer that is sensitive to hormones such as those who have estrogen and or progesterone receptors on their breast cancer cells.<sup>1,2</sup>
  - Targeted therapies (also called biological therapies) – drugs used to treat certain types of cancer cells to stop the cells growing and multiplying. This treatment is only suitable for women who carry specific proteins (HER2 receptors) on their cancer cells.<sup>2</sup>

## Chemotherapy in early stage breast cancer

- For women with early breast cancer, treatment with chemotherapy can lower the risk of breast cancer coming back or spreading to other parts of the body.<sup>2</sup> Chemotherapy can also increase the chance of surviving breast cancer.<sup>2</sup>
- Chemotherapy drugs can cause side effects, fortunately most side effects are temporary and steps can often be taken to prevent or reduce them.<sup>1</sup>

— ENDS —

### If you would like any further information or to arrange an interview please contact:

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*Disseminated by Burson-Marsteller on behalf of sanofi-aventis.*

### Notes to the Editor:

\*National breast cancer incidence data first became available in Australia in 1982.

### About sanofi-aventis :

Sanofi-aventis, a leading global pharmaceutical company, discovers, develops and distributes therapeutic solutions to improve the lives of everyone. Sanofi-aventis is listed in Paris (EURONEXT : SAN) and in New York (NYSE : SNY).

### References

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2. National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre. Guide for women with early breast cancer. National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre, Surry Hills, NSW, 2008.
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4. NSW Breast Cancer Institute. Breast cancer treatment protocol on TNM Staging. August 2009. Last viewed February 2010. Available at: [http://www.bci.org.au/images/stories/about\\_bc/q\\_a/TNM.pdf](http://www.bci.org.au/images/stories/about_bc/q_a/TNM.pdf)
5. U.S. department of health and human services, National Cancer Institute. Surgery choices for women with early stage breast cancer. August 2004
6. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre. *Series 50 Breast cancer in Australia, an overview 2009*. Canberra: AIHW October 2009

7. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the Australasian Association of Cancer Registries. Cancer in Australia an overview, 2008. Canberra: AIHW December 2008