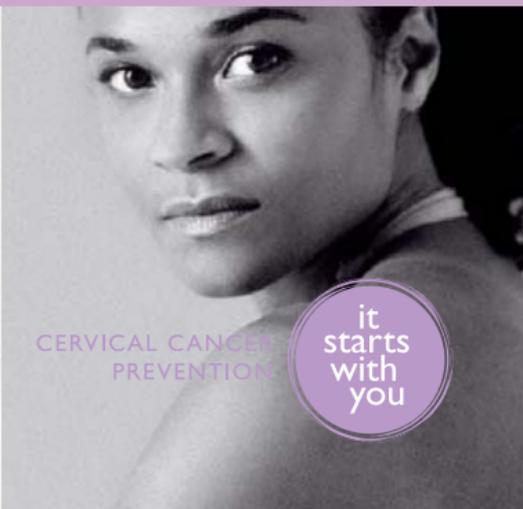




# CERVICAL CANCER

What you should know



CERVICAL CANCER  
PREVENTION

it  
starts  
with  
you



Cervical cancer is the 2nd most common cancer in women under 45 in the UK.

If you've had a sexual relationship you may be at risk – whatever your age or family history.

In the UK we have a world-leading screening programme which has had a significant impact on reducing cervical cancer. Despite this, in the UK alone, 3 women die from the disease every day. Many more receive news of an abnormal smear test which, although usually not cancer, can cause great anxiety, for both the woman and those close to her.

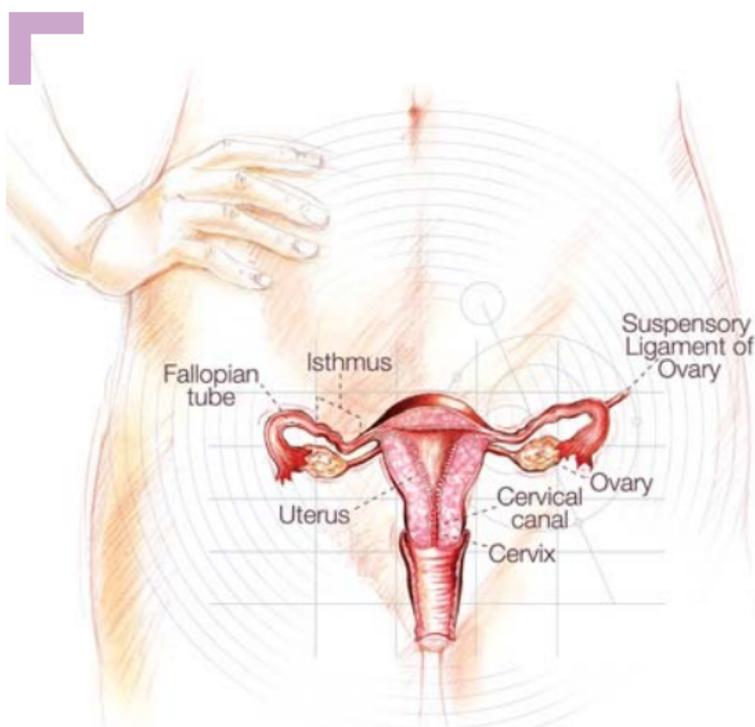
Do you know what actually causes cervical cancer and what you can do to protect yourself? Read on to find out more.

## FIRST, SOME INFORMATION ON THE CERVIX ITSELF

The cervix is the narrow neck of the uterus (womb). It has a small opening into the vagina, which allows menstrual blood to flow out of the uterus.

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As well as allowing menstrual flow, the cervix also acts as a barrier. Importantly, it helps prevent infections getting into your uterus.



**The cervix and uterus**

The cervix has a major role in pregnancy and birth.

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During pregnancy, the cervix remains tightly closed to help keep the baby inside the uterus. Then, when the baby is ready to be born, the cervix opens by about 10cm allowing the baby to pass through.



## What causes cervical cancer?

Contrary to what many people think, cervical cancer is not a hereditary condition. In fact, in the last 30 years, scientists from around the world have proved that cervical cancer is caused by certain types of a virus called the human papillomavirus or HPV.

# THE MAIN CAUSE OF CERVICAL CANCER IS A VIRUS

There are around 100 types of the virus. Most are low risk types and do not cause cervical cancer. Cancer-causing types, however, can cause the development of abnormal cells that can lead to cervical cancer.

## How is the virus spread?

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The virus can be transmitted during sex, or even sometimes during intimate genital skin-to-skin contact without penetration. So every sexually active woman risks catching it. In fact, up to three quarters of sexually active women will be infected with some type of HPV at some time in their lives. And whilst condoms may reduce the risk of infection, they do not fully protect you. This is because the skin immediately around the genital area can also carry the virus.

If you have a sexual relationship you may be at risk – whatever your age.

## How does cervical cancer develop?

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The HPV virus is very widespread and easily transmitted, but fortunately our immune systems usually fight off these infections without us even realising we've had them. It is only when our immune systems do not fight off the infection that the virus can remain in the cervix and, over a period of years, could develop into abnormal cervical cells. These abnormal cells can then develop into cervical cancer, unless they are identified early. If this occurs, there are usually no symptoms in the early stages of the disease. This is where smear tests have proved so vital in detecting changes on the cervix from any infection, whether recently contracted or years previously.



So what can I do?

# YOU CAN DO SOMETHING TO HELP YOURSELF – IT STARTS WITH YOU

## **Regular smear testing**

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Regular smear testing is the most effective way of detecting abnormal cells on the cervix which may be the early signs of cervical cancer. So, whilst the smear test does not prevent infection with the virus that causes cervical cancer, it does help to identify early signs of the disease. This then allows the right treatment to be given before cervical cancer can develop.

Many lives have been saved because the disease has been caught at an early stage as a direct result of smear tests. Smear tests only take about 5 minutes and most women agree that, although perhaps a bit uncomfortable or undignified, they do not hurt and are over very quickly. So, make a point of finding out when your next smear test is due.

## **Vaccination against cervical cancer**

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Vaccination will also help to protect you against cervical cancer. Vaccination offers protection against types of the virus that can cause cervical cancer in the first place. Even if you are vaccinated, regular smear tests are still necessary.

Talk to your doctor or nurse about whether you could benefit from vaccination.

In addition, leading a healthy lifestyle, not smoking and practising safe sex may also help you to protect yourself against cervical cancer.

# CERVICAL CANCER – THE ESSENTIAL FACTS

If you've found the information in this booklet interesting and helpful, please pass it on to a friend, or family member - someone who you think should also know this. The website shown below will also give you more details about cervical cancer, its prevention and treatment, and should answer any questions you may have. **And remember...**

- In the UK, 3 women die as a result of cervical cancer every day.
- A very common virus, HPV, is the cause of cervical cancer.
- The virus is transmitted through sexual intercourse and intimate skin-to-skin contact in the genital area.
- Infection rarely shows symptoms. While most infections clear up naturally, if they remain in the cervix, they can develop into cervical cancer over a period of years - unless they are detected and treated before cancer can develop.
- If you have a sexual relationship you may be at risk – whatever your age.
- **Ask your doctor how you can best protect yourself against cervical cancer**

To find out more visit

[www.cervicalcancerinfo.co.uk](http://www.cervicalcancerinfo.co.uk)



CERVICAL CANCER  
PREVENTION

