



Further information

What is HPV?

- Human papillomavirus or HPV is caught by having sexual contact with someone who has it.
- Most women will be infected with HPV at some point. The virus does not normally cause any problems and usually clears up on its own.
- Some types of HPV can cause changes in the cervix that may lead to cervical cancer.
- The types of HPV that cause warts are different from the ones that cause cancer.
- The types of HPV that cause cervical cancer have no symptoms.
- HPV itself does not show up in a smear test. The smear test detects early changes in the cervix that are caused by HPV. Treating these changes prevents cancer developing.

HPV vaccination

Girls aged 12–13 are offered a free vaccination to protect against cervical cancer. Three injections are given by a nurse at school over six months. The vaccine could help prevent seven out of 10 cervical cancer cases.

What should I look out for?

If you notice any of the signs and symptoms described in this leaflet make sure you see your doctor.

Look out for:

- bleeding between periods
- bleeding during or after sex
- bleeding after you have been through the menopause
- any unpleasant vaginal discharge
- discomfort or pain during sex.

These may be signs of other common conditions. They do not necessarily mean you have cancer. But it is best to get them checked out.

For more about cancer visit our patient information website www.cancerhelp.org.uk click on 'specific cancers' then 'cervical cancer'.

For more about cancer screening visit www.cancerresearchuk.org/health

To register with a doctor call NHS Direct on **0845 4647** or visit www.nhs.uk

If you want to talk in confidence about cancer, call our information nurses on freephone **0808 8004040**.

You can order our full range of leaflets free online at www.cancerresearchuk.org/leaflets

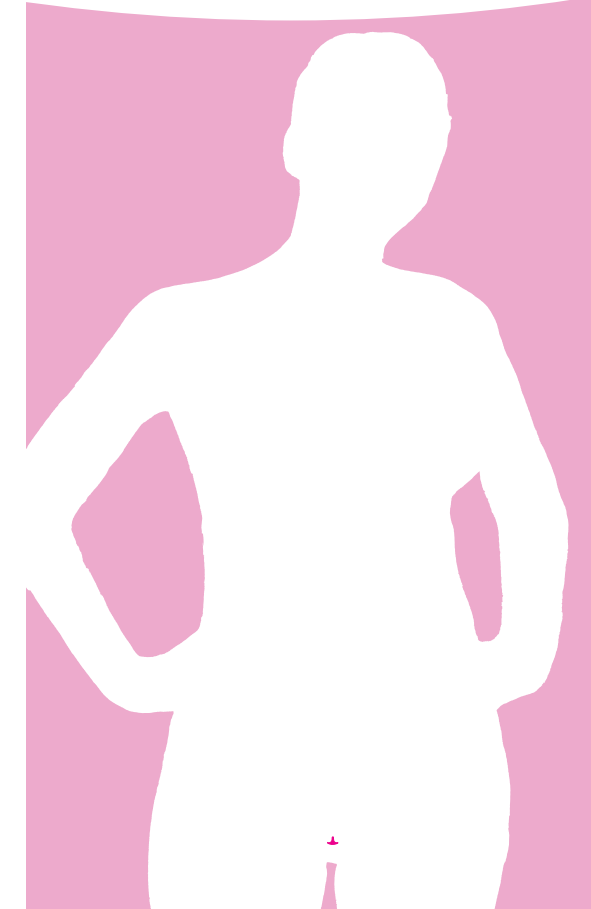
About Cancer Research UK

Cancer Research UK is the world's leading charity dedicated to finding out how to prevent, diagnose and treat cancer. If you would like to support our work, please call **020 7121 6699** or visit www.cancerresearchuk.org

Together we will beat cancer

Preventing cervical cancer

why screening is important





Most cases of cervical cancer could be prevented

Thanks to the 'smear test' (cervical screening), doctors can find and treat early changes in the cervix before they develop into cancer.

In this leaflet you can find out about:

- the cervix
- why it is so important to go for your smear test
- what will happen at your smear test
- symptoms of cervical cancer
- what affects your risk of cervical cancer.

How common is it?

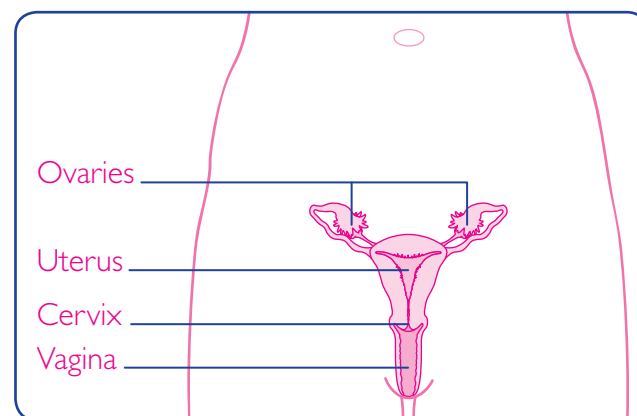
Because of the national screening programme the number of new cases of cervical cancer is now falling.

There are around 2,800 new cases of cervical cancer in the UK every year. It is the second most common cancer in women under the age of 35. But cervical cancer can affect women of any age who are, or once were, sexually active.

What is the cervix?

The cervix is a very strong muscle that connects a woman's womb and her vagina. It forms a small opening which lets through menstrual blood and sperm. During childbirth the cervix opens up to let the baby out.

The smear test checks the health of the cervix. It is important to go for your cervical smear test when invited.



Why is the smear test so important?

The smear test helps doctors find changes in the cervix early before they have a chance to develop into cancer.

Treating early changes can prevent cervical cancer from developing. Treatment is easy and effective. The smear test saves the lives of thousands of women every year.

Who can go for a smear test?

Local health services across the UK invite women for free smear tests at their local doctor's surgery or clinic.

Women who are registered with a doctor are invited for cervical smear tests every three to five years, from their early twenties to their early sixties. If you are not registered with a doctor call **NHS Direct** on **0845 4647**.

It is important to go for a smear test whenever you are invited.

What happens at a smear test?

The test is very simple and only takes around five minutes. It should not be painful although some women do find it slightly uncomfortable.

You can ask to see a female doctor or nurse. The doctor or nurse will take a sample of cells from your cervix using a small brush. These cells will then be sent to a laboratory to be looked at carefully.

Most women have normal results. Sometimes a sample is not clear enough and you may need to have another test. If you have an abnormal result this does not mean you have cancer. It means that some of the cells in your test may have undergone changes and may need to be treated. If you have an abnormal result your doctor will talk to you about having further tests.

What affects your risk of cervical cancer?

Not attending screening

If you do not go for screening doctors will not be able to check the health of your cervix or treat any early changes. These changes, if left untreated, could develop into cervical cancer.

Smoking

Smoking doubles your risk of developing cervical cancer. This is because the chemicals in cigarette smoke can affect the cervix.

HPV

Nearly all cases of cervical cancer are linked to a common sexually transmitted infection called human papillomavirus or HPV.

Unprotected sex

Condoms protect against many sexually transmitted infections and can reduce your chances of getting or spreading HPV infection.

The Pill

Research shows that long-term use of the Pill very slightly increases your risk of cervical cancer. It is important to know that taking the Pill can help to protect you against womb and ovarian cancers.