

Cervical Cancer Awareness Month



Each year, January is marked as Cervical Cancer Awareness Month to encourage women to become more health conscious. Throughout their lives, many women neglect their cervical health. If women become more knowledgeable about this, they will be able to detect health issues at an early stage and get treatment as soon as possible.

Theme for 2023

The WHO theme for 2023 is "Ending cervical cancer" within a few generations, focusing on:

- Get informed. Find out the facts about cervical cancer and the human papillomavirus (HPV) that causes it. Help educate other women in your life too.
- Get screened. Cervical cancer screening typically starts at age 30 and is repeated periodically.
- Get vaccinated. The HPV vaccine is given in 2 doses that should begin when a girl is between 9 and 14 years old.

WHO Key Facts

- Among women worldwide, cervical cancer is the fourth most common cancer, with an estimated 604,000 new cases and 342,000 deaths in 2020.
- About 50% of high-grade pre-cancers are caused by two types of human papillomavirus (HPV) (16 and 18)
- There is a 6 times greater likelihood of developing cervical cancer among HIV-positive women than among HIV-negative women.
- The prevention of cervical cancer can be achieved by vaccinating against HPV and screening and treating pre-cancer lesions.
- Early detection and prompt treatment of cervical cancer can cure the disease.



What is Cervical Cancer?

Cervical Cancer is a type of cancer that occurs in the cells of the lower part of the uterus that connects to the vagina due to the growth of abnormal cells in the lining of the cervix.



Symptoms Of Cervical Cancer

Early-stage cervical cancer symptoms include:

- Light bleeding or spotting between periods in women of reproductive age
- Spotting or bleeding after menopause.
- A foul-smelling vaginal discharge may occur.

With cervical cancer's progression, more severe symptoms may appear, including:

- Chronic pain in the back, leg, or pelvis.
- Loss of appetite, fatigue, and weight loss.
- Foul-smelling discharge and vaginal discomfort.
- Swelling of a leg or both lower extremities.

Causes and Risk Factors:

The beginning of cervical cancer occurs when healthy cervix cells develop mutations in their DNA. In DNA, a cell receives instructions on how to function.

A healthy cell grows and multiplies at a set rate, eventually dying at a set time. As a result of the mutations, the cells grow out of control and multiply out of control, and they do not die. Masses (tumours) are formed when abnormal cells accumulate. Invasive cancer cells can spread (metastasize) from a tumour to other tissues.

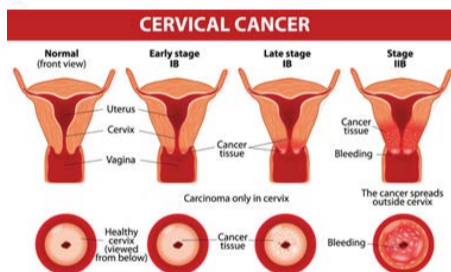
There is a significant risk factor for cervical cancer associated with persistent infection with some types of high-risk human papillomavirus (HPV). Furthermore, smoking is one of the main risk factors for cervical cancer.

Human papillomavirus, or HPV, is one of the most prevalent types of viruses. In most people, they don't cause any problems, but some types can cause genital warts or cancer.



Types of cervical cancer

- **Squamous cell carcinoma.** It is caused by thin, flat cells (squamous cells) that line the exterior portion of the cervix, which extends into the vagina. Squamous cell carcinomas account for most cervical cancers.
- **Adenocarcinoma.** A column-shaped glandular cell line of the cervical canal is affected by this type of cervical cancer.



Diagnosis

Cervical cancer can be diagnosed by using a magnifying instrument (colposcope) to look for abnormal cells. Further tests are required if the doctor determines that cervical cancer has occurred. The stage of cancer determines the treatment.

Staging exams include:

- Imaging tests: Tests such as X-rays, CTs, and MRIs.
- Using special scopes to inspect the bladder and rectum visually.

Treatment

Several factors influence cervical cancer treatment, including the stage of the disease, other health problems and patient preferences. A combination of surgery, radiation and chemotherapy may be used to treat cancer.

Cervical Cancer Surgery

The most effective treatment for cervical cancer is surgery at an early stage. Depending on the size and stage of cancer and whether the patient wishes to become pregnant in the future.

Surgery options include:

- Surgery to cut away cancer only.
- Surgery to remove the cervix (trachelectomy).
- Surgery to remove the cervix and uterus (hysterectomy)



Prevention and Screening

Comprehensive cervical cancer control includes:

1. Primary prevention (vaccination against HPV).
2. Secondary prevention (regular screening with Pap test and treatment of pre-cancerous lesions).
3. Tertiary prevention (diagnosis and treatment of invasive cervical cancer).



When to Get Screened?

Pap tests and HPV tests can help prevent cervical cancer or detect it early. The recommendation for the cervical cancer screening programme by DOH includes:

Screening tests:

- Papanicolaou test, (also called Pap test). Liquid-based cytology (LBC) is the accepted standard method for Pap test specimen collection.
- The HPV test, as co-testing, is for women aged 30 years and above. Only FDA HPV-approved tests are accepted for screening.

The frequency for repeat screening for average-risk, symptom free women is:

- Every three years for women aged 25-29 years.
- Every 5 years for women 30-65 years and annually for women who are immune-compromised due to disease or medication.