



# CERVICAL CANCER PREVENTION AND SCREENING

Cancer Prevention Series 2

The cervix is the tissue leading from the uterus to the vagina.

Almost all cervical cancers are caused by persistent infection with one of the cancer-causing (or high-risk) human papillomavirus (HPV) types. HPV infection is usually found in people who have ever been sexually active. Most people with HPV infection do not have any symptoms and will clear the infection on their own. Some women with persistent high-risk HPV infection in the cervix will develop abnormal (pre-cancerous) cell changes. While the majority of these changes will regress to normal, some may progress to cancer over years.

## Am I at risk of cervical cancer?

Risk factors of cervical cancer include:

- Sexual intercourse at early age, and having multiple sexual partners
- Smoking
- Weakened immunity such as being infected with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)
- Younger age at first pregnancy or increasing parity
- Long term use of oral contraceptive pills for more than 5 years (the risk returns to normal after 10 years of cessation)
- Co-infection with sexually-transmitted diseases



## How to reduce the chance of getting cervical cancer?

1. Practice safe sex (such as use condoms and avoid having multiple sexual partners) to reduce the chance of HPV Infection and to protect against sexually transmitted diseases.
2. Avoid smoking.
3. Get HPV vaccination (cervical cancer vaccination) before having sexual experience.



Apart from the above measures, cervical cancer screening offers you additional protection. Regular cervical cancer screening by cervical smear (also named Pap smear) and timely treatment of the detected pre-cancerous changes can effectively prevent cervical cancer.

## Where can I have cervical cancer screening?

- A list of healthcare providers or organisations registered with the Cervical Screening Programme is available at [www.cervicalscreening.gov.hk](http://www.cervicalscreening.gov.hk).
- As individual healthcare providers may have different appointment procedures and service charges, please contact them directly to enquire about service arrangements.
- Recipients of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) and medical fee waiving in public hospitals and clinics who are waived from payment for their public health care (such as Maternal and Child Health Centres of the Department of Health) can have their charges waived upon presentation of valid documents.

## What are the common symptoms of cervical cancer?

The symptoms of cervical cancer may not be easily noticed at early stage.

The common symptom is abnormal vaginal bleeding, which includes vaginal bleeding between periods, during or after sexual intercourse, or after menopause.

You should consult a doctor as soon as possible if you develop any of the above symptoms.

## Should I get screened?

Women **aged 25 to 64 years old** who ever had sex are recommended to have cervical cancer screening by cytology every three years after 2 consecutive normal annual smears.

Women **at or above 65 years old** who ever had sex and have never had cervical cancer screening should discuss with their doctors about having screening.

Women **aged 21 to 24 years old** who ever had sex and risk factors (such as having multiple sexual partners, smoking etc.), should consult their doctors about the need for cervical cancer screening.



Department of Health