



CERVICAL CANCER PREVENTION AND SCREENING


Cancer Prevention Series 2

The cervix is the muscular organ, which leads 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 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 for cervical cancer include:

- Sexual intercourse at early age and having multiple sexual partners
- Smoking 
- Weakened immunity, e.g. 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?

- Practise safer sex (e.g. use condoms and avoid having multiple sexual partners) to reduce the chance of HPV infection and to protect against sexually transmitted diseases 
- Get HPV vaccination (cervical cancer vaccination) before having sexual experience 
- Avoid smoking

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.
- 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), holders of waivers of medical charges under the Medical Fee Waiving Mechanism of Public Hospitals and Clinics, or Level 0 voucher holders of the Pilot Scheme on Residential Care Service Voucher for the Elderly are waived from payment for their public healthcare services (e.g. Maternal and Child Health Centres of the Department of Health).



Apart from the measures highlighted above, 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.

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 smear every three years after 2 consecutive normal annual smears.

In general, women **aged 65 years old or above** who ever had sex and have not received routine screening in the past 10 years should be screened, even after menopause, no sex for years or with sterilisation done.

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



Department of Health