

Cervical Cancer and Its Prevention

Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer worldwide in women under 45 years.

If you have ever had a sexual relationship you may be at risk of cervical cancer- whatever your age or family history, regardless of the number of partners you have had.

Causes of Cervical Cancer

The main cause of cervical cancer is a virus. It has been proven that virtually all cervical cancer is caused by the Human Papillomavirus-(HPV).

HPV is spread through sex and sometimes during intimate genital skin to skin contact. Therefore, every woman who has ever been sexually active, regardless of age, is at risk of catching it. Three quarters of sexually active women will be infected with HPV at some point in their lives.

Condoms are very effective against sexually transmitted diseases. However, they do not give full protection against HPV, as the skin immediately around the genital area can also carry the virus.

Smoking is a risk factor for the development of cervical cancer. Women who smoke are more at risk than non smokers.

The majority of women will be unaware that they are infected with HPV. In most women HPV will cause no long-term harm and will be cleared by the immune system. Even if you have had one infection you may still be at risk of future HPV infection, as previous infection may not provide sufficient immunity to prevent a future infection. However regular cervical screening will detect any cell changes caused by HPV infection that could go on to become cancer.

Vaccination against Cervical Cancer

The best time to be vaccinated is before you become sexually active and before any risk of exposure to the HPV virus. This is because vaccination can protect against infection with the two most common types of HPV which can cause cervical cancer.

However, if you are already sexually active, the vaccination can protect you against future infection. It does not give you protection against any infections you may have but will protect you from future infections.

Both younger and older sexually active women are at risk from HPV infection because; unlike with other viruses like chickenpox, being infected once doesn't mean you are necessarily protected against a future infection.

How does the Vaccine work?

The cervical cancer vaccine works by stimulating your immune system to provide protection against HPV infection.

Your immune system is designed to protect you from infections. In most cases, the immune system deals successfully with any initial HPV infection and clears it.

However, if the immune system does not clear the infection, abnormal cells can develop on the cervix, developing over time into cancer.

Vaccination can offer effective protection against the two high risk types of HPV infection responsible for 71.5% of cervical cancers in Europe and North America.

How safe is the Vaccine?

Cervarix, like all vaccines, has undergone many clinical trials and monitoring before being approved for use. Several thousand women across a wide age range have received the vaccination during monitored trials.

The most common side effect is pain at the site of injection. In the majority of cases these side effects were not non-lasting.

We are happy to discuss any issues with you, alternatively please log onto

www.cervicalcancerinfo.co.uk