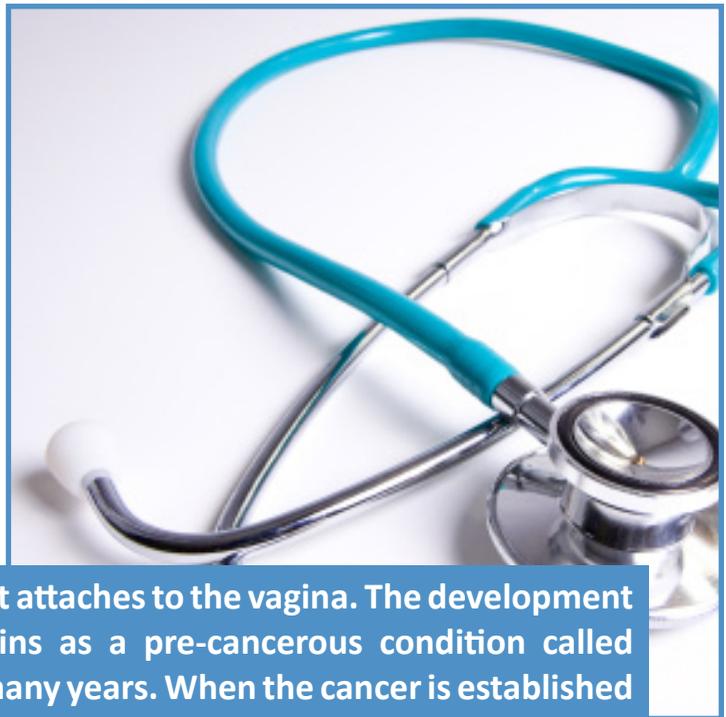


# Cervical cancer



The cervix is the neck of the uterus that attaches to the vagina. The development of cervical cancer is gradual. It begins as a pre-cancerous condition called dysplasia and development can take many years. When the cancer is established it quickly spreads into the nearby tissues and organs.

Risk factors that contribute to the development of cervical cancer include:

- Infection with the human papillomavirus (HPV). It is a sexually transmitted infection (STI). Other STIs like herpes and chlamydia can also cause cervical cancer.
- Sexual intercourse at a young age.
- Having multiple sexual partners and/or partners who have multiple partners.
- Daughters of women who were treated with DES (diethylstilbestrol) in the 1950s.
- Having an immune deficiency like HIV & AIDS.
- Living in poor socio-economic areas.
- Smoking.

Symptoms include persistent vaginal discharge, abnormal vaginal bleeding, especially after intercourse, loss of appetite, weight loss, pelvic, back, or leg pain, leaking of urine or faeces from the vagina, and bone fractures (broken bones).

## Prevention

A vaccine is available to prevent HPV infection, a major causal factor in cervical cancer. Talk to your doctor. Every woman should have a pelvic examination and a Pap smear when she becomes sexually active. All abnormal findings should be

followed up.

Tests that may be done include:

- Pap smear.
- Colposcopy.
- Biopsy.
- Cystoscopy.
- Colonoscopy.

Treatment of cervical cancer will depend on the type of cancer, the stage, the size and shape of the tumour, age, and general health. In the early stages, it can be cured by removing or destroying the cancerous area and often the uterus can be saved. A hysterectomy (removal of the uterus) may be necessary. In more advanced cases, the uterus and much of the surrounding tissue is removed. In severe cases all of the organs of the pelvis, including the bladder and rectum, are removed. Radiation (treatment with radioactive light waves) and chemotherapy (anticancer medication) can also be used to kill off the cancer cells.

All women should have regular cervical Pap smears to prevent, and allow for an early diagnosis, of cervical cancer. Speak to your doctor for more information.