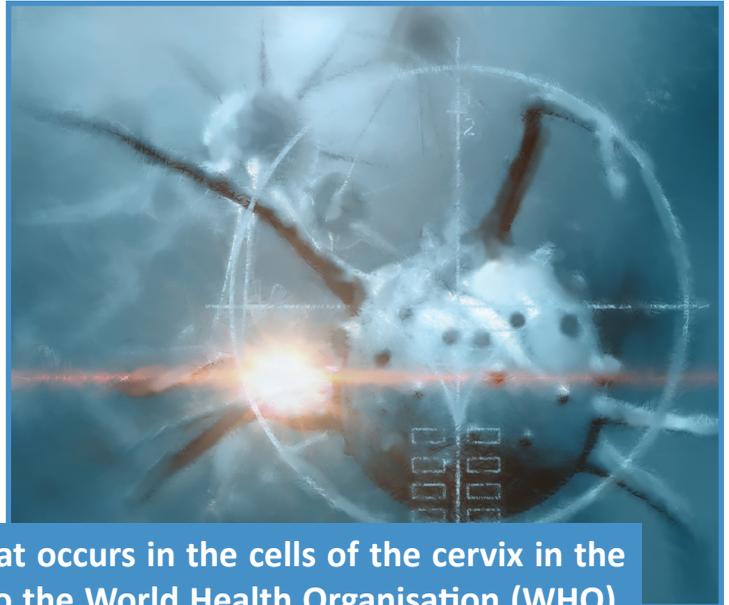


Cervical cancer awareness



Cervical cancer is a type of cancer that occurs in the cells of the cervix in the lower part of the uterus. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), two types of the sexually transmitted infection called human papillomavirus (HPV) cause 70% of all cervical cancers and precancerous cervical lesions.

Signs and symptoms

In its early stages, cervical cancer generally shows no obvious signs or symptoms. When the cancer is more advanced, however, the following signs and symptoms may present:

- Vaginal bleeding after intercourse, between periods or after menopause.
- Watery, bloody vaginal discharge that may be heavy and have a bad odour.
- Pelvic pain or pain during intercourse.

Risk factors and prevention

The Mayo Clinic lists several risk factors for cervical cancer, including:

- **Multiple sexual partners.** The greater your number of sexual partners — and the greater your partner's number of sexual partners — the greater your risk of contracting HPV.
- **Early sexual activity.** Having sex at an early age increases your risk of HPV.
- **Other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).** Having other STIs — such as chlamydia, gonorrhoea, syphilis, and HIV & AIDS — increases your risk of HPV.
- **A weak immune system.** You may be more likely to develop cervical cancer if your immune system is weakened by another

health condition and you have HPV.

- **Smoking.** Smoking is associated with squamous cell cervical cancer.

To reduce your risk, consider the following:

- **Have routine Pap smears.** Pap smears can detect precancerous conditions of the cervix, so they can be monitored or treated in order to prevent cervical cancer. Women are advised to start Pap smears at age 21 and repeat them every few years. From age 30, women are advised to combine a Pap smear with an HPV test every few years.
- **Speak to your doctor about getting vaccinated against HPV.** According to WHO, there are two vaccines available that are safe and effective in preventing infection with HPV 16 and 18.
- **Practise safe sex.** Using a condom, having fewer sexual partners, and delaying intercourse may reduce your risk.
- **Don't smoke.** Speak to your doctor about how to quit if you are a smoker.

Early detection is key

Cervical cancer can be successfully treated, especially with early detection, which is why Pap smears are key.