



ECCA

HUMAN PAPILLOMA VIRUS (HPV) AND CERVICAL CANCER

The ECCA supports the reduction of cervical cancer in Europe by promoting awareness of cervical cancer and the means by which it can be prevented. Drawing upon the expertise of researchers, clinicians and public health organisations from across Europe, the ECCA has prepared:

The leaflets

- Cervical cancer screening
- Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) and cervical cancer
- Follow-up and treatment of an abnormal cervical smear
- Vaccination against HPV and cervical cancer

The booklets

- Everything you need to know to help you avoid cervical cancer
- Everything you need to know if you have an abnormal cervical smear

For additional information

📄 Visit our website: www.ecca.info

✉ Send your questions to: info@ecca.info

- Cervical cancer is caused by a virus called the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV).

- HPV is generally spread by sexual contact. It is so common that most adults will have had HPV at some time in their lives.

Most HPV infections have no symptoms and disappear on their own. However, some women will not clear their HPV, and it is these women who have an increased risk of cervical cancer.

- Vaccination is now available to reduce the risk of cervical cancer, but it will not eliminate need for screening. Together, screening and vaccination will offer the most effective protection against cervical cancer.

- What causes cervical cancer?
- How do you catch genital HPV?
- How can you protect yourself?
- Can genital HPV be treated?
- Will HPV affect my pregnancy?
- What is HPV testing?

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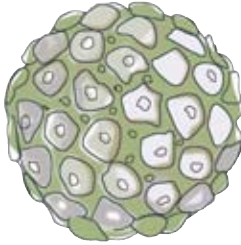
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What causes cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer is caused by certain types of the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). There are more than 100 types of HPV and about 15 of these can cause abnormal cervical cells which can progress to cervical cancer.

Most women who get HPV will clear it in 6 to 24 months without ever knowing they had it. However, some will not clear their HPV and it is these women who have an increased risk of developing cervical cancer.



Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)

How do you catch genital HPV?

Genital HPV is usually spread by sexual contact. It can be spread from one person to another by any skin to skin contact, not just sexual intercourse.

HPV is very common and most adults will have had it at some time in their life.

How can you protect yourself?

Although condoms are very effective in preventing other sexually transmitted infections, they are not as effective in preventing HPV, probably because HPV can be found on skin not covered by the condom.

Vaccination is now available to protect women against the 2 most common types of HPV, types 16 & 18, which cause about 2/3rds of all cervical cancers and many abnormal Pap tests. These vaccines will be most effective if given before you have had HPV 16 or 18, but they will not effectively protect against all HPV types. Therefore, even if you have been vaccinated, you should still be screened. Together, screening and vaccination will offer the most effective protection against cervical cancer.

Can genital HPV be treated?

There are treatments for the HPV types that cause genital warts, but these have not been shown to work for the HPV types that can cause cervical cancer. Fortunately, most HPV infections disappear on their own within 6 to 24 months without any problem.

Will HPV affect my pregnancy?

The HPVs that can cause cervical cancer are very common



and not known to have any effect on pregnancy. If you have HPV, there is no need to alter your normal obstetrical care.

What is HPV testing?

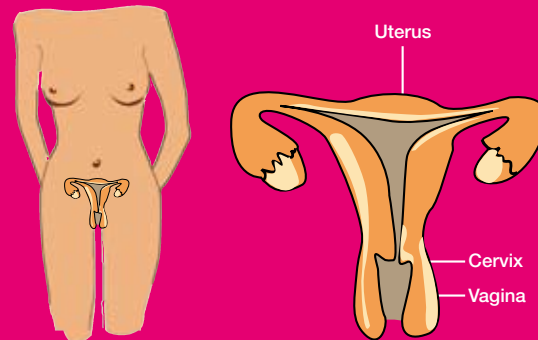
HPV testing is used to find out if you have HPV.

Although there are no treatments for the HPV types that can cause cervical cancer, finding out whether you have HPV or not helps to define your risk. If you do not have HPV, your risk is very low and you can safely go back to routine screening. If you do have HPV and it does not go away on its own, then a follow-up to find out if you have abnormal cervical cells may be required so that they can be removed to prevent cancer developing.

HPV testing is not available on the NHS at this time although its use is being studied. It is available privately in the UK, but before you have a HPV test, you should know that HPV testing is not recommended for women under 30 years of age. This is because HPV is very common in women under the age of 30, but normally clears without any problems.

Cervical cancer develops in the cervix, the part of the uterus that opens into the vagina. It occurs when cells of the cervix become abnormal and start to grow in an uncontrolled fashion. Cervical screening is designed to find abnormal cervical cells in the early stages. This is when they can be easily removed so they do not develop into cervical cancer.

All women from 25 to 60 years of age should be screened. Women who are 25 to 44 years of age should be screened once every 3 years, while those from 45 to 60 years of age should be screened once every 5 years, after two consecutive negatives.



What does the HPV result mean?

In Ireland, HPV testing is currently used for the follow-up of women whose Pap test shows minor abnormalities (ASC-US).

- If the HPV test is negative, the risk of cervical cancer is very low. A new Pap test in a year will be advised.
- If the HPV test is positive, the risk of cervical cancer is higher and a colposcopy will be advised to examine your cervix more closely. If anything abnormal is found, your gynaecologist will advise you of the appropriate follow-up.