



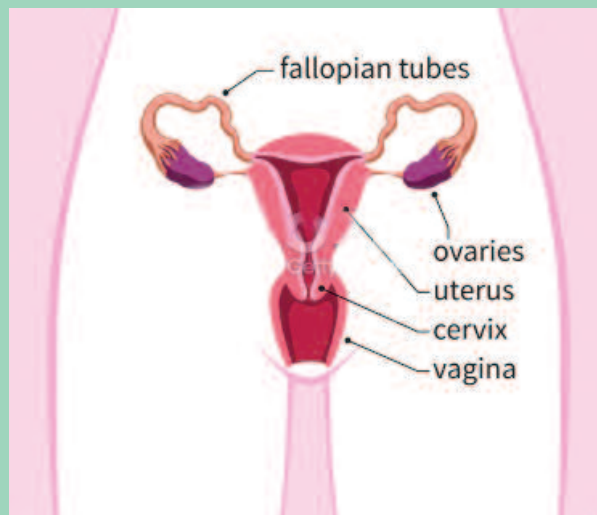
My GynaeHealth

Over 3,000 cases of cervical cancer are diagnosed in the UK each year leading to over 1,000 deaths. Unlike some other cancers cervical cancer is a larger issue for younger women. More than 60% of cervical cancers are identifying in women between 20 and 49.

The NHS runs a national screening programme starting from the age of 25. This involves a GP appointment and a traditional smear test which many women find uncomfortable. If certain types of abnormal cells are identified an HPV test will be done. GynaeCheck actually tests for the presence of the HPV first. A traditional smear test will then only be needed if the HPV is present. If no HPV is present a woman can potentially choose to continue with GynaeCheck and not need a traditional smear test again as long as GynaeCheck remains normal.

What is cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer forms in tissues of the cervix. The cervix is an organ that connects the uterus and vagina. It is usually a slow-growing cancer that may or may not have symptoms but can be prevented through regular screening.



Cervical cancer is not thought to be hereditary.

99.9% of cervical cancers are caused by persistent high-risk human papillomavirus (HPV) infection, which causes changes to the cervical cells. HPV is an extremely common virus; around four out of five people will be exposed to the virus. Anyone who is sexually active can be infected with HPV at some time and the body's immune system will usually clear it. Generally, most people don't even know they have contracted the virus.

Cervical abnormalities are caused by persistent high-risk HPV infection. This can cause abnormal changes in the cervical cells, most often pre-cancerous but given time (often years) they may go on to develop into cancer. Mildly abnormal cells are actually quite common, and often these changes revert to normal by themselves.

Information from the NHS Screening Programme shows that up to 7-9% of women will have abnormal cells of which only a very small percentage will go on to develop cancer.

The most effective method of preventing cervical cancer is through regular cervical screening. Cervical cancer is largely preventable by regular screening and, if caught early, survival rates are very high.



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Am I at risk of developing cervical cancer?

HPV is spread through sexual contact (HPV also plays an important role in mouth and anal cancers). The use of safe sex practices, such as condoms, can reduce the exposure to HPV. However, as HPV can be present across the genital area, the use of a condom does not give complete protection.

Other risk factors include: Long term use of the oral contraceptive pill (more than 10 years), smoking, a weakened immune system, and the presence of other infections such as chlamydia.

An HPV vaccine is now given to school girls in the UK. This vaccine protects against the two commonest strains of HPV that cause cervical cancer, and can help prevent 75% of cervical cancers.

Women who have had the vaccine should still continue with regular screening.



What should I look out for?

The symptoms of cervical cancer are not always obvious and it may not cause any symptoms at all.

Early symptoms include:

- Unusual bleeding
- Pain and discomfort during sex
- Unpleasant smelling vaginal discharge

If you notice such changes please ensure that you see a doctor immediately

The earlier a cancer is picked up, the easier it is to treat and the more likely the treatment is to be successful. So it is important that you speak to your GP as soon as possible if you notice any worrying symptoms.

What if my result is abnormal?

If you have an abnormal result, you will need review by a GP or Gynaecologist to decide the best way forward. A traditional smear test will then be needed if you are not up to date or have never had one. The GP or Gynaecologist will then advise on appropriate management. It will be important to continue with regular screening either by GynaeCheck or traditional smear tests.

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GynaeHealth UK is part of the
Check4Cancer group.