



**FReHA**

# Cervical Cancer



## What is cervical cancer?

Every minute, one woman is diagnosed with cervical cancer, worldwide. In Malaysia, it is the third most common cancer.

Cervical cancer forms when the DNA in cells in the cervix mutate or change. In some cases, these mutated cells grow out of control, forming a tumor in the cervix. It is almost exclusively caused by a human papillomavirus (HPV) infection. HPVs are a group of more than 200 related viruses. Each virus in the group is given a number (HPV Type). HPV Type 16 and 18 are the types that cause the greater risk of cervical cancer. Not all women with HPV infection will develop cervical cancer. At diagnosis, the cancer is often just within the cervix, but it may spread to tissues around the cervix or to other parts of the body.

Cervical cancer is the easiest gynecological cancer to prevent with regular Pap smear tests, HPV vaccinations and follow-ups. However, despite numerous screening programs for early detection of pre-invasive disease of the cervix, many women have been diagnosed at invasive stage of cervical cancer.

## Who is at risk of getting cervical cancer?

As mentioned above, the main cause of cervical cancer is an infection known as HPV. HPV is the virus that is transmitted during sexual intercourse and affects different body areas such as the skin, vagina and cervix. HPV infections are so common that nearly all men or women will get at least one type of

HPV at some point in their lives. Certain types of sexual behaviors are considered risk factors, including early onset of sexual activity (teen years), sex with multiple partners or sex with someone who has had multiple partners. Women with HPV who smoke are at twice the risk of developing cervical cancer.

Although HPV is often the main cause of cervical cancer, having HPV DOES NOT mean you will get cancer. Up to 80 percent of women and men will contract HPV in their lifetime. A healthy immune system will usually kill the HPV virus, including the high-risk types; leaving only a small percentage of women developing cervical cancer. Girls and young women who are treated with HPV vaccine have significantly reduced risk of developing cervical cancer later in life.

Apart from sexual history and smoking habit, other conditions that may cause cervical cancer is weakened immune system (eg. People with HIV).

## What are the symptoms?

Cervical cancer does not show any signs or symptoms at an early stage. At an advanced stage, symptoms that may occur are such as bloating (for no good reason), feeling too full too fast, unusual blood spots or light bleeding, heavier than usual menstrual bleeding, bleeding after menopause or sexual intercourse, increase in vaginal discharge and unexplained, persistent pelvic and/or back pain or pressure that doesn't go away. You may contact us

the FReHA or see your nearest gynecologists if you have these symptoms. The only way to verify the symptoms of cervical cancer is by seeing a doctor.

## Early diagnosis

There are two tests that can help you diagnose cervical cancer early; they are:

### Pap smear test

- Doctor will examine the vagina and cervix and collect cells and mucus from your cervix and the area around it, which will then be tested for abnormalities in a laboratory.
- The Pap smear test can detect irregular cells, including cancer cells in the cervix and cells showing changes that increase the risk of cervical cancer.

### HPV DNA Test

- HPV DNA test involves testing cells collected from the cervix for infection with any of the types of HPV that are most likely to cause these cell changes and lead to cervical cancer.

## When should someone get tested for cervical cancer?

It is recommended to get a Pap smear test done once in every 3 years after a woman turns 20, or whenever she becomes sexually active; whichever comes first. The three-year recommendation is based on the assumption that the first two consecutive Pap results are negative.

Always check with your doctor regarding your risk of cervical cancer and how often you should be checked.

It is important to continue getting a Pap smear test, even if you think you are too old to have a child or are not having sex anymore.

## When should HPV vaccination be taken?

Vaccination is recommended best before a person becomes sexually active.

## How can we keep an eye on cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable and treatable forms of cancer as long as it is prevented with HPV Vaccination, detected early and managed effectively. The following should be carried out:

1. Get routine Pap smear or HPV test.
2. Always follow up with your doctor if your screening results are not normal.
3. Get HPV vaccine to protect against the types of HPVs that most often cause cervical cancer. It is recommended for both boys and girls aged 11 to 12 years, but can be given as early as 9 years old. The vaccine is given in a series of either two or three shots, depending on age.
4. Note that it is still important for women who are already vaccinated need to have regular Pap-smear test to screen for cervical cancer.

## Sources

CDC. (n.d.). *Inside Knowledge 2018 Cervical Cancer Factsheet*. Retrieved September 23, 2020, from [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)

*Cervical cancer - Diagnosis and treatment - Mayo Clinic*. (n.d.). Retrieved September 23, 2020, from <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/cervical-cancer/diagnosis-treatment/drc-20352506>

Com, I. (2013). *Comprehensive cervical cancer prevention and control: a healthier future for girls and women WHO GUIDANCE NOTE WHO Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data WHO guidance note: comprehensive cervical cancer prevention and control: a healthier future for girls and women*. [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)

Cervical Cancer Screening

<https://cancer.org.my/get-screened/cancer-screening-clinics/cervical-cancer-screening/>

Human Papillomavirus (HPV)

<https://www.cdc.gov/hpv/parents/about-hpv.html>

What are the symptoms? Not just words

[https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/basic\\_info/symptoms.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/basic_info/symptoms.htm)

Cervical cancer

<https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/cancers/en/>

Cervical cancer risk factors

<https://www.cancercenter.com/cancer-types/cervical-cancer/risk-factors>