

Cervical Cancer and its prevention: What you should know

Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer world wide in women under 45. If you have ever had a sexual relationship you may be at risk of cervical cancer- whatever your age or family history, and regardless of the number of partners you have had.

The good news is that great progress is being made in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of cervical cancer. But do you know what actually causes cervical cancer and what you can do to protect yourself? Read on to learn more about this important issue, and feel free to contact us to talk through any questions you may have about cervical cancer or its prevention.

What is the cervix?

The cervix protects your uterus by acting as a barrier to infections. It is the lower, narrow end of the uterus (womb) that forms a canal between the uterus and the vagina. The cervix allows the menstrual blood and also a baby to pass from the uterus into the vagina, and the sperm to pass from the vagina into the uterus.

What causes cervical cancer?

You may be surprised to learn that the main cause of cervical cancer is a virus. Scientists have proven that virtually all-cervical cancer is caused by certain types of a virus called human papillomavirus (HPV)

How is HPV spread?

HPV is spread through sex, and even sometimes during intimate genital skin-to-skin contact. Therefore, every woman who has ever been sexually active, regardless of age, is at risk of catching it. In fact, three quarters of sexually active women will be infected with HPV at sometime in their lives.

Condoms are very effective against sexually transmitted diseases. However, they do not offer full protection against HPV, as the skin immediately around the genital area can also carry the virus.

The human papilloma viruses (HPVs) are a group of more than 100 different types of virus. They are given numbers to distinguish them. HPVs can be transmitted through contact, including sexual intercourse. Some of the HPV viruses can cause warts – those numbered HPV 6 and HPV 11. These two are sometimes called low risk because they are not associated with cervical cancer.

Some types of HPV can increase the risk of developing cervical cancer particularly numbers 16, 18, 30 and 33. They are called high risk because just about all cancers are positive for high risk HPV.

Vaccines are now available to prevent infection with human papilloma virus (HPV). As HPV is a risk factor for Gardasil and Cervarix cervical cancer vaccines were licensed and launched in the UK in 2007. They can prevent HPV causing cervical cancer in almost all girls and women.

We are now operating a new cervical cancer vaccination service from The Travel Clinic Ltd; there are two types of vaccinations, which protect. Normally the vaccines are given to 11 – 24 years of age