

What is HPV?

All cervical cancers are linked to a very common virus called the human papillomavirus or HPV. HPV usually doesn't cause any harm and most people will be infected with it at some point in their life. There are many different HPV types, most are harmless but some cause genital warts and others cause changes that can develop into cervical cancer.



**HPV is very
common and
usually clears
up on its own**

HPV can be passed on through close skin-to-skin contact, usually during sex. People who have had more sexual partners or who started having sex earlier have a higher risk of getting the virus.

HPV vaccination

The NHS offers girls aged 12–13 vaccination to help protect against cervical cancer. They have two injections, at least six months apart. A nurse at school gives them the injections.

The vaccine protects against the two types of HPV that cause about 7 in 10 cervical cancer cases. But it does not protect against all types of HPV, so cervical screening is still important.

How can you reduce your risk?



Practise safer sex

Using condoms won't protect you completely from HPV, but they can reduce your chances of getting or passing on the virus. Condoms also help protect against many sexually transmitted infections, including HIV which can also cause cervical cancer.



Stop smoking

Smoking increases the risk of cervical cancer and can make it harder to treat abnormal cells.

What else affects your risk?

• Age

Cervical cancer is rare below the age of 25. Risk is highest between the ages of 25-39. Older women can still develop cervical cancer, and about 1 in 5 cases are in women aged 65 and over.

• The Pill

Using the contraceptive Pill for more than 5 years increases the risk of cervical cancer. However, this risk goes back down after you stop taking it. The Pill also slightly increases the risk of breast cancer but reduces the risk of womb and ovarian cancers.

• Personal or family history

You may be at higher risk if your mother, sister or daughter has had cervical cancer, or if you have had some types of cancer before.

Further information

You can find out more about cancer at www.cruk.org/about-cancer

Find out more about our health messages at www.cruk.org/health

For more about the signs and symptoms of cancer visit www.spotcancerearly.com

If you want to talk in confidence about cancer, call our information nurses on freephone **0808 800 4040**, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

All our leaflets are thoroughly researched and based on the most up-to-date scientific evidence. They are reviewed by independent experts and updated regularly. You can order our full range of leaflets free online at www.cruk.org/leaflets

About Cancer Research UK

We pioneer life-saving research to bring forward the day when all cancers are cured. From our volunteers and supporters to our scientists, doctors and nurses, we're all here to save more lives and prevent, control and cure all cancers.

Together we will beat cancer sooner. If you would like to support our work, call **0300 123 1861** or visit our website www.cruk.org

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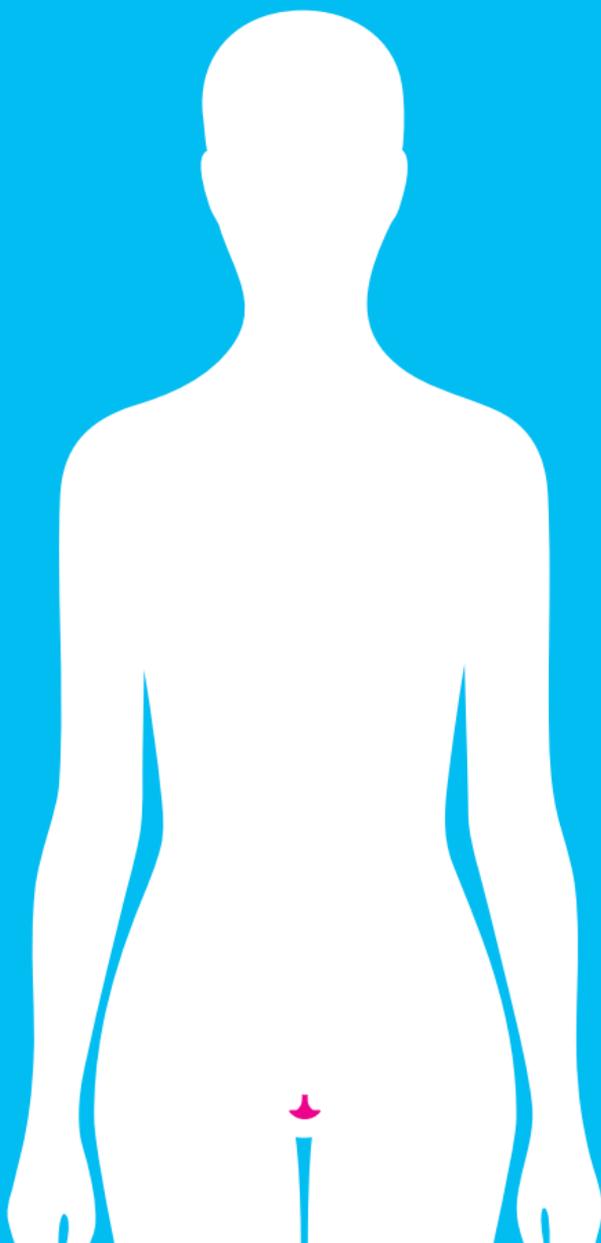
CERVICAL CANCER

How to spot the signs and symptoms
and reduce your risk

cruk.org



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Cervical cancer is the most common cancer in women under 35 in the UK, but can affect women of any age.

Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable cancer types. Screening, vaccination and lifestyle can all play a role.

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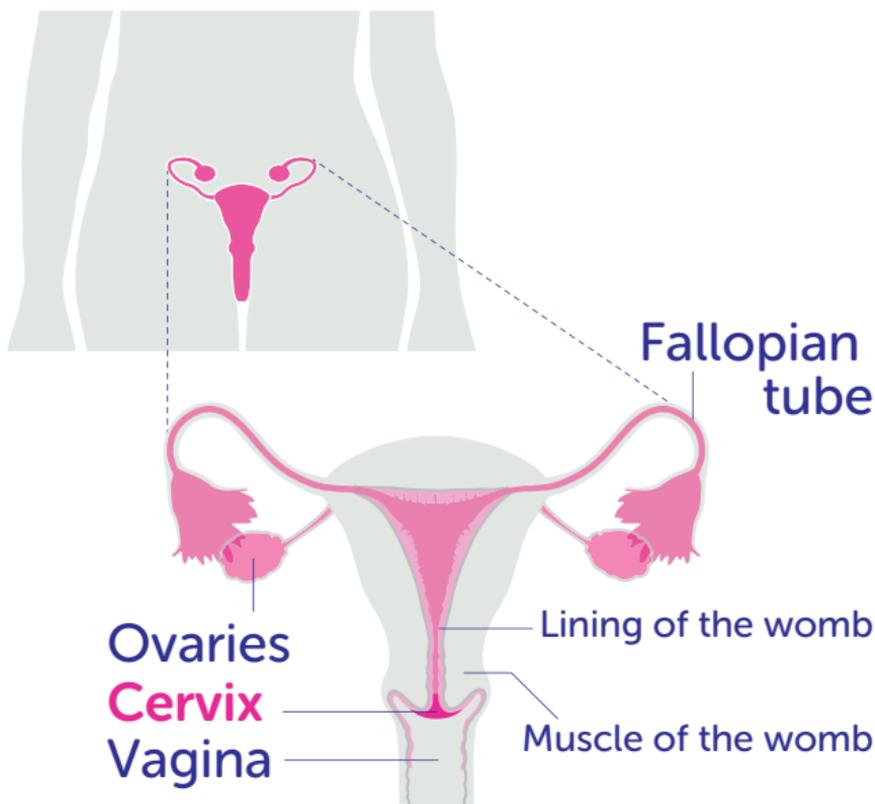
In this leaflet you can find out about:

- cervical screening
- signs and symptoms to look out for
- how to reduce the risk of cervical cancer.

What is the cervix?

The cervix is the opening to the womb at the top of the vagina. It is sometimes called the neck of the womb. It forms a small opening to let a period flow out and sperm in.

The womb, cervix, vagina and ovaries make up a woman's reproductive system.



Cervical screening

Screening is for people who don't have any symptoms. Cervical screening (which many people know as the 'smear test'), can help prevent cancer by finding abnormal cells in the cervix before they can develop into cancer. Doctors can remove these abnormal cells to prevent cervical cancer.

Like other screening tests, cervical screening is not perfect, and treatment for abnormal cells can have risks. **But doctors think the benefits of preventing cervical cancer outweigh the risks of screening.**

**Cervical
screening saves
up to 5,000 lives
from cervical
cancer every year
in the UK**

What is the cervical screening test?

Cervical screening is very simple and only takes around 5 minutes. It should not be painful, but some women do find it uncomfortable.

If you prefer, you can ask to see a female doctor or nurse. They will take a sample of cells from your cervix using a small brush. These cells are sent to a lab to be looked at under a microscope. They will post your results to you, usually within 2 weeks.

Most women have normal results. Sometimes a sample is not clear enough and you may need another test. An abnormal result does not mean that you have cancer. You will be offered more tests to see if you need any abnormal cells from your cervix removed. Screening can find cervical cancer too, but out of everyone who's screened this is rare.

Who can have cervical screening?

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland

women aged 25-64 are offered screening.
Women aged

25-49

are invited every 3 years.

Women aged

50-64

are invited every 5 years.

Until April 2016, women in **Scotland** aged 20-60 will be offered screening every 3 years. From April 2016 this will change to match England, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

You need to be registered with a doctor to be invited to screening. If you are not, use www.nhs.uk to find local GPs.

What should I look out for?

No matter what your age and even if you have been for cervical screening or had the HPV vaccination, it is important to see your doctor if you notice any bleeding:

- between periods
- during or after sex
- after the menopause.

Get to know your body and keep an eye out for these or any other changes that are unusual or don't go away - for example pain or a change in vaginal discharge (fluid). It's more likely to be something less serious but it's best to get checked out.