

CERVICAL CANCER

Awareness Week: 22 January – 28 January 2012



How common is it?

Cervical cancer is cancer of the cervix and 85-90 new cases are diagnosed every year in Northern Ireland. The cervix is another name for the opening to the womb from the vagina. The younger you are at diagnosis, the better your chances of recovering completely from it.

What causes it?

There are several known risk factors for developing cervical cancer, the most important being infection with a 'high-risk' type of Human Papilloma Virus (or 'HPV') through sexual intercourse.

How can I be screened for it?

Early detection and treatment is estimated to prevent up to 80 per cent of cervical cancers. Having a cervical screening test (smear test) every 3-5 years is important in women between 20-64 years of age who are, or have been, sexually active. Cervical cancer is rare in women who have never had sexual intercourse. Your GP should offer you the screening, or you can choose to have it at a Well Woman or a Family Planning clinic.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms to be concerned about are as follows:

- Abnormal vaginal bleeding, for example between periods or after sex;
- Continuous vaginal discharge which may be pale, watery, pink, brown, bloody, or foul-smelling;
- Discomfort during sex,
- Vaginal bleeding after the menopause.

How is it diagnosed?

If you have had an abnormal screening result, or have symptoms that are of concern, your GP may recommend a colposcopy. A colposcopy is simply a close examination of your cervix by a specially trained doctor or nurse using a lighted magnifying instrument called a colposcope. A small sample of tissue may be taken from your cervix and sent to a laboratory for testing.

How is it treated?

Treatment options for cervical cancer include surgery, radiotherapy and chemotherapy. Sometimes these treatments are used together. Your treating doctor would advise you which treatment is best for you.

Prevention of cervical cancer

The following steps may help to reduce your risk of cervical cancer.

- Condoms – using these during sex gives you some protection.
- Regular smears – these are part of the NHS cervical screening programme and can detect pre-cancerous cells in your cervix.
- HPV vaccine – girls aged between 12 and 13 across the UK are now offered a vaccine which protects against the HPV strains most likely to cause cervical cancer. A three-year catch-up programme to vaccinate girls under 18 began in 2009.

IF YOU ARE CONCERNED, CONTACT YOUR GP

FURTHER INFORMATION AND ADVICE:

www.nicsohs.gov.uk

www.actioncancer.org/

<http://hcd2.bupa.co.uk/>

www.nidirect.gov.uk

www.cancerhelp.org.uk/

www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/

<http://info.cancerresearchuk.org/>

www.ulstercancer.org



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