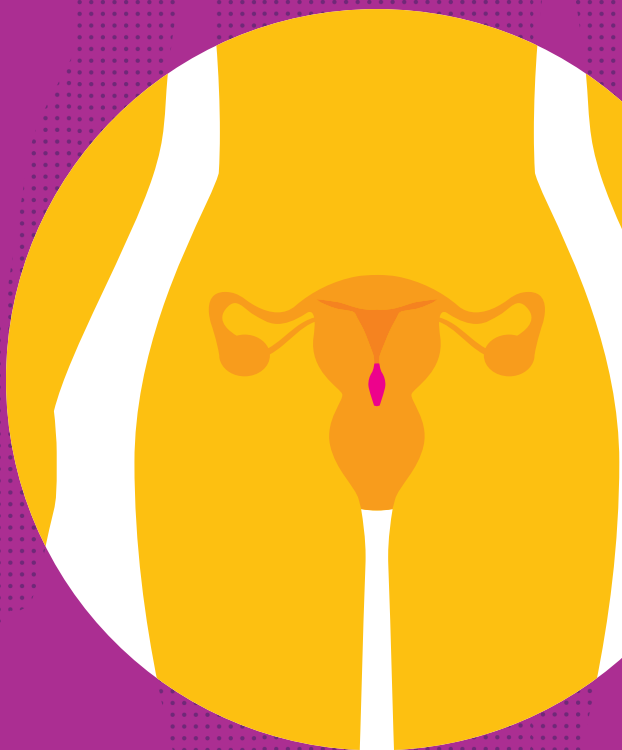


Cervical Cancer

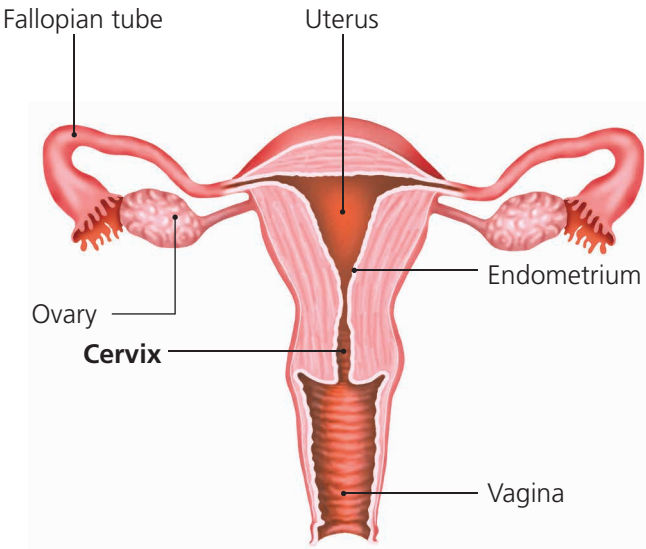
What you should know



What is cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer is when normal cells in the lining of your cervix grow in an abnormal way to form a swelling called a tumour.

The cervix is inside your vagina at the lower end of your womb (uterus). It is often called the neck of the womb because it is the opening to the womb from the vagina. The cervix is shaped like a cylinder or tube and is about 2.5 cm (1 inch) long.



What increases my risk of cervical cancer?



Some types of human papillomavirus (HPV)

Most women who have sex will have HPV (a common sexually transmitted infection) at some point in their lives. Normally the infection clears up on its own. This might take up to 18 months. If an HPV infection doesn't clear up it is known as a persistent infection. Some types of HPV can lead to abnormal changes in the cells of the cervix. Over time these changes sometimes turn into cancer.



Smoking

Nicotine can affect how your body fights HPV infection. This can result in a persistent infection, which increases the risk of abnormal changes (called CIN) developing in your cervix.



Problems with immunity

If you've had a transplant or have kidney disease and need dialysis, your body may struggle to fight an HPV infection. Talk to your doctor about what steps you need to take to protect yourself.

What are the symptoms of cervical cancer?

- Abnormal vaginal bleeding. For example, bleeding in between your periods, after sex or after the menopause.
- An abnormal vaginal discharge that may smell unpleasant.
- Discomfort or pain during sex, or in the pelvic area.

These symptoms are usually caused by other things, but always get them checked out.

What should I do if I have any symptoms?

If you have any symptoms or changes in your body that you are worried about, it's important to have them checked by your GP (family doctor). Getting your symptoms checked is not wasting anyone's time. The sooner cancer is spotted, the more likely you are to recover from it.

How is cervical cancer diagnosed?

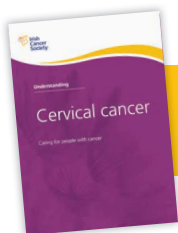
Your doctor is likely to use an instrument called a speculum to examine your cervix and see inside it more clearly. They may send you for further tests. Tests that can help to diagnose cervical cancer include:



Colposcopy: This is done by a specialist in hospital who examines your cervix using a colposcope. This is a large microscope with a bright light that helps them to look more closely at the surface of your cervix. Most women who have a colposcopy don't have cancer.



Biopsy: The specialist takes tissue samples from your cervix. The samples are examined under a microscope in a laboratory to see if there are abnormal changes.



If you are diagnosed with cervical cancer our booklet has more information.

How can I reduce my risk of cervical cancer?



Have regular cervical screening tests: This can help to spot any changes to cervical cells before they turn cancerous. If you are aged 25-29 you will usually have a test every 3 years. If you are aged 30-65 you will usually have a test every 5 years.



Don't smoke: Not smoking will make it easier for your body to fight an HPV infection and reduce the risk of cancerous changes in the cells in your cervix.



Take the HPV vaccine: The vaccine is offered to boys and girls in first year in secondary school. The vaccine prevents infection with the types of HPV that cause most cancers and it protects against cervical cancer later in life.

Visit www.HPV.ie for more information.

See the end of this leaflet for tips on how to reduce your risk of cancer in general.



What is cervical cancer screening?

Cervical screening involves a doctor or nurse gently putting an instrument called a speculum into your vagina to take a sample from the cervix using a special brush. The sample is checked to see if you have any of the high-risk types of human papillomavirus (hrHPV) that cause cervical cancer.

If no hrHPV is found: There's a really low risk of you developing cervical cancer in the next 5 years, after which time you'll have another test.

If hrHPV is found: The sample of cells will be checked for abnormal changes. If you have abnormal changes you will be referred to hospital for a colposcopy test (explained above).

Most people referred for a colposcopy don't need any treatment, but you will have regular screening tests until the infection clears.

Treatment for abnormal changes (CIN) is usually very successful in stopping cancer from developing.

CervicalCheck is the national cervical screening programme. You should be sent regular invitations for free cervical checks if you're aged 25 to 65. To get more information and to check when your next test is due, go to the website www.cervicalcheck.ie

Cervical screening is a test to spot people at risk of developing cancer.

12 ways to reduce your cancer risk



Do not smoke



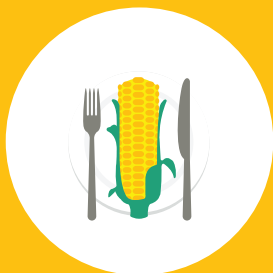
Avoid second-hand smoke



Be a healthy weight



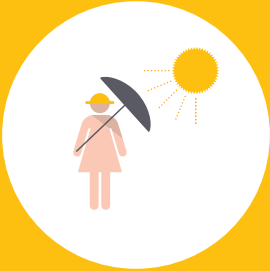
Be physically active in everyday life



Have a healthy diet



Avoid alcohol



Avoid too much sun



Avoid pollutants



Get screened for cancer



**Breastfeed your baby/
Talk to your doctor
about HRT (a hormonal
drug for menopausal
symptoms)***



**Get vaccinations -
Hepatitis B for
babies/HPV for
older children**



**Find out if you are
exposed to radon
gas in your area.
See www.epa.ie**

* Some types of HRT may increase the risk of some cancers. The benefits and risks vary from person to person.

Cervical cancer facts

Cervical cancer does not form suddenly. Over time, normal cells may change into a pre-cancerous condition called CIN. This can turn into cancer if you don't get treatment.



Cervical cancer is not infectious and cannot be passed on to others.



Screening won't prevent all cases of cervical cancer but, along with the HPV vaccination for schoolchildren, it's the best way to protect against cervical cancer.



How common is cervical cancer?

Around 300 cases of cervical cancer are diagnosed in Ireland each year. It's most common in women in their 40s and 50s.

More information

If you are worried or have questions about cervical cancer, our cancer nurses are here for you...



Call our Support Line
Freephone 1800 200 700



Email supportline@irishcancer.ie
for confidential advice, support and information.

Visit our Daffodil Centres where our nurses can give you advice about healthy lifestyles and reducing your risk of cancer. To find out where your local Daffodil Centre is, email daffodilcentreinfo@irishcancer.ie

Visit our website www.cancer.ie for more information on cervical cancer and ways to reduce your risk of cancer.

Want to stop smoking?

Quitting smoking is one of the best things you can do to reduce your risk of cancer.

If you would like advice or support on quitting, call the HSE Quit Team on CallSave **1800 201 203**, Freetext **QUIT** to **50100** or visit www.quit.ie