

Causes, screening, and treatment: Cervical cancer 101



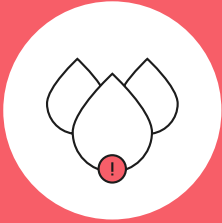
Cervical cancer is a cancer that's found anywhere in the cervix, the opening between the vagina and the womb (uterus). **It can happen to women of any age**, but it's most common in women aged between 30 and 35.

Cervical cancer is **the fourth most common cancer in women globally**, but cases have declined significantly due to widespread screening and HPV vaccination programmes.

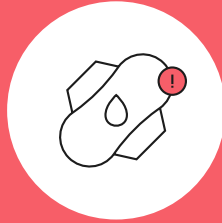
Here are the key facts about cervical cancer, how to prevent it, and how to treat it.

Symptoms:

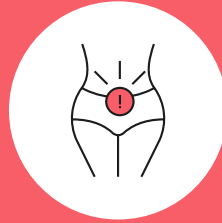
Cervical cancer symptoms can be subtle, especially in the early stages. Watch out for:



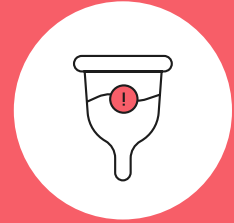
Bleeding after sex
or between periods



Heavier periods
than usual



Unexplained
pelvic pain

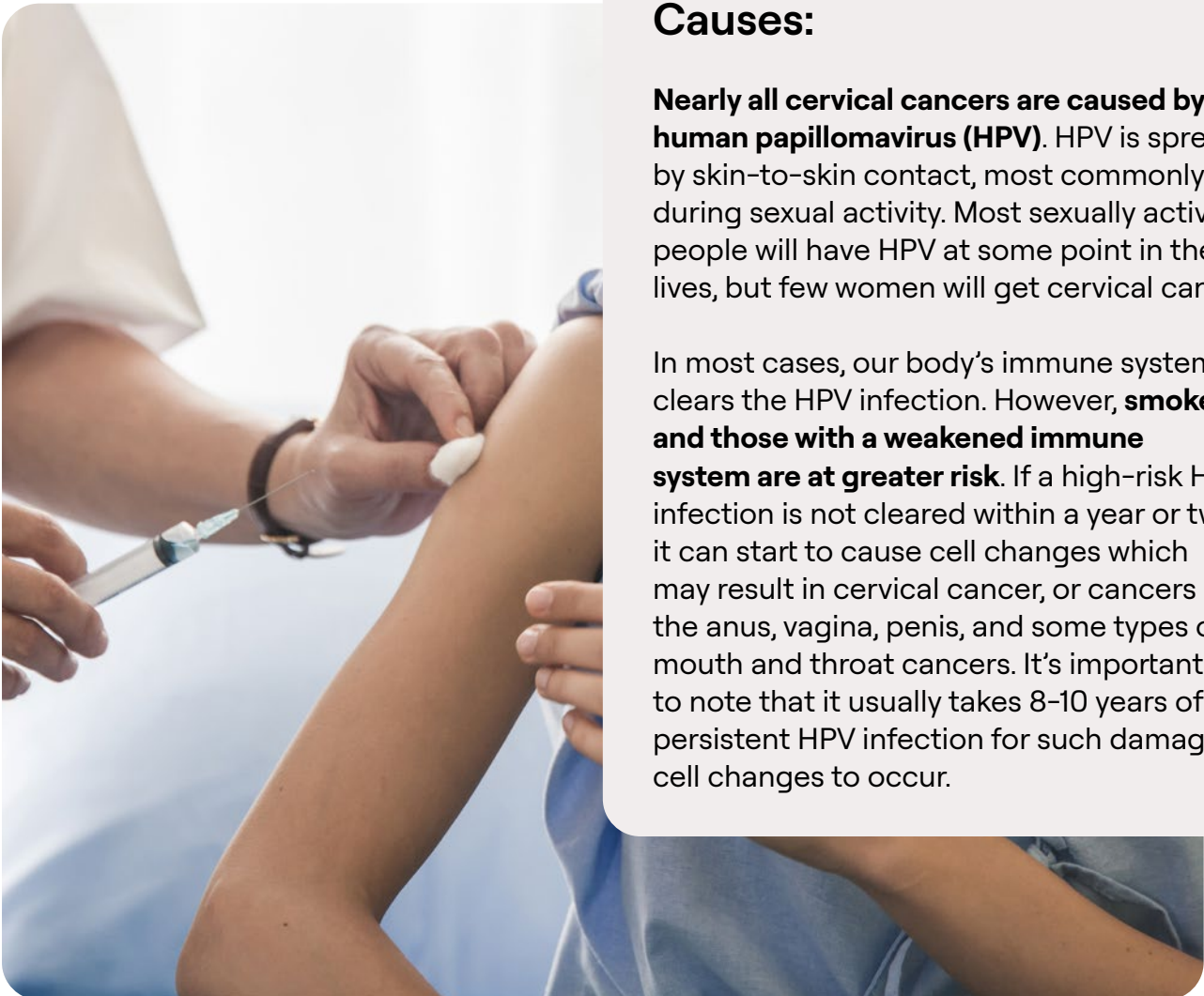


Unusual vaginal
discharge

Causes:

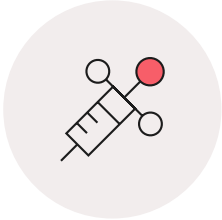
Nearly all cervical cancers are caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is spread by skin-to-skin contact, most commonly during sexual activity. Most sexually active people will have HPV at some point in their lives, but few women will get cervical cancer.

In most cases, our body's immune system clears the HPV infection. However, **smokers and those with a weakened immune system are at greater risk.** If a high-risk HPV infection is not cleared within a year or two, it can start to cause cell changes which may result in cervical cancer, or cancers of the anus, vagina, penis, and some types of mouth and throat cancers. It's important to note that it usually takes 8-10 years of persistent HPV infection for such damaging cell changes to occur.

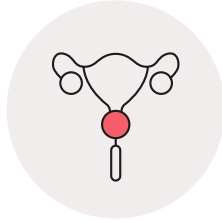


Prevention:

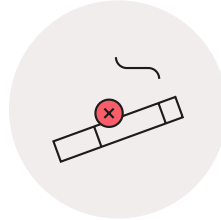
In 99.8% of cases, cervical cancer is preventable, and there are measures you can take to significantly lower your risk. You can reduce your risk of cervical cancer by:



Getting vaccinated
against HPV



Attending regular
cervical screening tests



Stopping
smoking



Using protection
during intercourse

Being vaccinated for HPV dramatically reduces the risk of a persistent infection but it's still important to attend cervical screening tests when invited to do so. While the vaccine covers several types of HPV, it doesn't cover all and therefore isn't 100% effective.

Early detection followed by prompt treatment can cure cervical cancer, no matter what age you are.



Getting screened:

Regular cervical screenings (a.k.a. smear tests) are crucial for early detection. Smear tests detect high-risk HPV in women and check for early changes in their cervical cells before they become cancerous. When cell changes are picked up before they're cancerous, they're very treatable with an outpatient procedure and/or colposcopy.

You'll need to be registered with a GP to get your screening invitations.

Gynaecologic cancers are often diagnosed at later stages because the symptoms can be hard to spot. That's why it's important to see a doctor regularly and to get screened for these diseases.



Treatment:

There are several effective treatments for cervical cancer once it's reached a more advanced stage. The main treatments are:

- **Surgery** - in which doctors remove the cancerous tissue
- **Radiation therapy** - where high-energy rays (similar to X-rays) kill the cancer
- **Chemotherapy** - to shrink or kill the cancer

Remember, to reduce the risk of cervical cancer, or any other diseases caused by HPV, it's important to get vaccinated, stop smoking, wear condoms during intercourse, and attend regular cervical smear tests. If you have any concerns or are experiencing any of the symptoms listed above, contact your GP immediately.

Contact **HealthHero** today for more support and advice. We're with you every step of the way.
