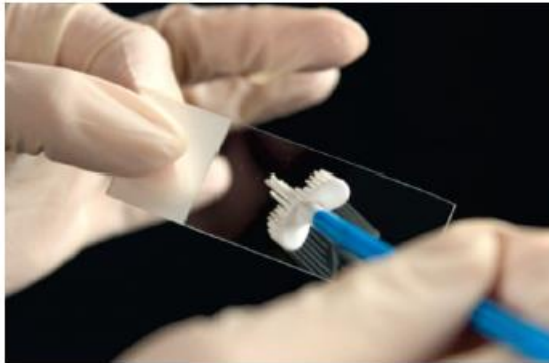
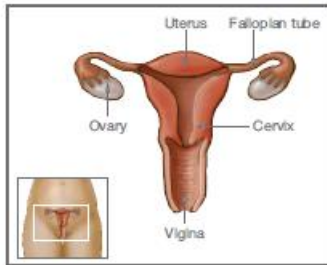


SCREENING FOR CERVICAL CANCER



What is Cervical Cancer?

The cervix is the lower, narrow end of the uterus (womb). The cervix connects the vagina to the upper part of the uterus. When cancer starts in the cervix, it is called cervical cancer.



All women are at risk for cervical cancer. It occurs most often in women over age 30. Worldwide, cervical cancer is the second most common cancer in women¹. In South Africa, cervical cancer not only ranks as the second most common cancer among women, but also the second most common cancer among women between the ages of 15 and 44 years².

The role of Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) in cervical cancer

The Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) is the main cause of cervical cancer. There are in excess of 150 types of Human Papilloma Viruses³. More than 40 of these viruses can be easily spread through direct skin-to-skin contact during vaginal, anal, and oral sex.



Sexually transmitted HPVs fall into two categories³:

- Low-risk HPVs, which do not cause cancer but can cause skin warts (on or around the genitals or anus). For example, HPV types 6 and 11 cause 90 percent of all genital warts.
- High-risk HPVs, which can cause cancer. At least a dozen high-risk HPV types have been identified. Two of these, HPV types 16 and 18, are responsible for the majority of HPV-caused cancers.

In South Africa, it is thought that about 21% of women have cervical HPV infection at a given time, and almost 63% of invasive cervical cancers are attributed to two HPV types. These are HPV 16 and 18².

High-risk HPV infection account for close to 100% of cervical cancers. However, most high-risk HPV infections in the cervix occur without any symptoms, go away within 1 to 2 years, and do not cause cancer. These transient infections may cause abnormal cell changes that go away on their own³.

Some HPV infections, however, can persist for many years. Persistent infection with specific types of HPV (most frequently, types 16 and 18) may lead to precancerous lesions. If untreated, these lesions may progress to cervical cancer .

Other factors may increase the risk of developing cervical cancer following a high-risk HPV infection include a weakened immune system, for example in HIV-infection.

Screening for cervical cancer

The good news is that cervical cancer is one of the most preventable cancers.



Early detection and treatment of precancerous lesions can prevent the majority of cervical cancers.

This is achieved through regular screening tests and follow-up. Screening tests can help prevent cervical cancer or find the cancer early.

Research now indicates that the most appropriate screening tests for cervical cancer incorporate the following:

- Pap test (or Pap smear) looks for 'pre-cancers', i.e. cell changes on the cervix that might become cervical cancer if they are not treated appropriately.
- HPV testing for high risk HPV types, including types 16 and 18.

Speak to your healthcare professional about determining the best approach to screen for cervical cancer, based on your individual circumstances.

HPV vaccination

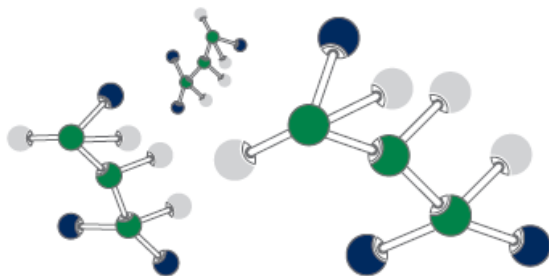
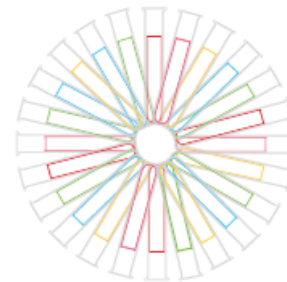
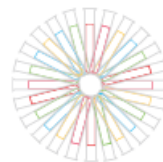
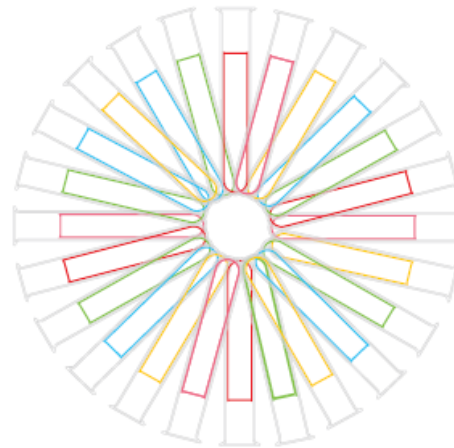
HPV vaccines that protect against HPV 6, 11, 16 and 18 infection are now available. These vaccines have the potential to prevent the majority of cases of cervical cancer.

The vaccines work best if administered prior to exposure to HPV. Therefore, it is best to be vaccinated before sexual debut occurs. It is important to note that the vaccines cannot treat HPV infection or HPV-associated disease.

Lancet Laboratories offers cutting edge diagnostic services to screen for cervical cancer, including Pap tests and HPV tests.

References:

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2. WHO/ICO HPV Information Centre. Human Papilloma Virus and Related Cancers: Summary Report Update. September 15 2010
3. HPV and Cancer Fact Sheet. National Cancer Institute at the National Institutes of Health. <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Risk/HPV> Accessed on 26 May 2013
4. World Health Organisation Guidance Note: Comprehensive cervical cancer prevention and control: a healthier future for girls and women. WHO 2013



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