

Cervical Cancer

What you should know



Marie Keating

FOUNDATION

making cancer less frightening by enlightening

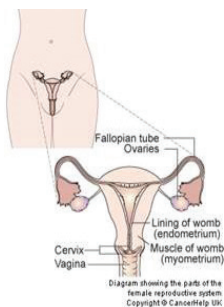
cervical cancer the facts

- Around 300 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer in Ireland each year
- Cervical cancer is the 4th most common cancer worldwide
- It mostly affects women aged 30 to 50 and is rare under the age 25
- When diagnosed early, cervical cancer is very treatable

The cervix and cervical cancer

Cervical cancer is when abnormal cells in the lining of the cervix grow in an uncontrolled way and eventually form a tumour (growth). The cervix is another name for the neck of the womb. The womb and cervix are part of a woman's reproductive system, which is made up of the:

- Vagina
- Womb (Uterine), including the cervix
- Ovaries
- Fallopian tubes



Types of cervical cancer

There are two main types of cervical cancer. The most common is squamous cell carcinoma. This develops from a type of cell that covers the outside of the cervix.

The other type is adenocarcinoma. This develops from a different type of cell found in the cervical canal. The area where cervical cells are most likely to develop is called the transformation zone. It is the area just around the opening of the cervix.

Risks and causes of cervical cancer

- **Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)** – Almost all cases of cervical cancer are caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is the most common sexually transmitted disease worldwide and is mainly transmitted through any kind of sexual contact with an infected person. About 80% of all women will get a HPV infection during their lifetime, usually in their late teens and early 20s. Most HPV infections will clear naturally but some caused by high risk HPV infection can progress to cervical cancer.

Other risk factors include:

- If you smoke you are twice as likely to develop cervical cancer as those who don't smoke
- having a weakened immune system. E.g. Human immunodeficiency virus or organ transplant
- being sexually active in early teenage years or having several sexual partners
- long-term use of oral contraceptives (birth control pills). Risk goes back down when stopped
- Having multiple full-term pregnancies (>3) or having your first baby before the age of 17

What to look out for

Early cervical cancers and pre-cancerous cell changes don't usually have symptoms. The most common symptoms of cervical cancer include:

- Bleeding between periods
- Bleeding after or during sex
- Bleeding at any time after the menopause
- Bleeding between scheduled smears
- A vaginal discharge that smells unpleasant
- Discomfort or pain during sex

There are many other conditions that cause these symptoms. However, if you experience any of the above, please contact your G.P. just to be sure.

CervicalCheck- the National Cervical Screening Programme

CervicalCheck is a government funded service that provides free HPV cervical screening to women in Ireland age 25-65. HPV cervical screening replaces the 'smear' since March 2020. Cervical screening checks the health of your cervix. It's not a test for cancer, it's a test to help prevent cancer from developing.

Women are invited for free HPV cervical screening:

- Every 3 years for women aged 25 – 30
- Every 5 years for women aged 30 - 65

HPV cervical screening:

- is a better way of cervical screening?
- prevents more cancers
- taken in the same way as the smear
- if your sample tests positive for HPV, it will then be checked for abnormal cells

Visit **www.cervicalcheck.ie** or Freephone **1800 45 45 55** to check that you are on the register. Women who have already participated in CervicalCheck will be automatically receive a letter when their next screen is due.

You do not need to wait until you receive a letter to have a test. If your screening test is due or you missed your last test, you can go ahead and book a test. Visit cervicalcheck.ie for a list of GP practices or clinics where you can avail of your free HPV cervical screening test. If you experience any the symptoms outlined above between your cervical screens please do contact your doctor. Do not wait for your next invite for screening.

Your cervical screening results

Your cervical screening test results will be sent to you in a letter. If you are waiting for a long period for your results, contact your GP or clinic to see if they have any updates. Your letter may say:

- HPV not found - next screening test in 3 or 5 years depending on your age
- HPV found and no abnormal cells changes - you should have a repeat test in 12 months
- HPV found and abnormal cell changes - you need a follow-up test called a colposcopy
- Inadequate or unsatisfactory sample - you'll need to have a repeat test after 3 months.

Cervical cancer is a rare outcome of a HPV infection. In most cases, it takes about 10 to 15 years for cervical cancer to develop.

How cervical cancer is diagnosed

You should see your G.P. if you notice a change that isn't normal for you or if you have any of the possible signs and symptoms outlined above. Even if you're worried about what the symptom might be, don't delay in seeing your G.P.

Treatment

When pre – cancerous cells are diagnosed a number of procedures can be carried out to treat these cells.

Treatment for cervical cancer depends on the type, stage and grade of cancer but may include:

- Surgery
- Radiotherapy (External and/or Brachytherapy)
- Chemotherapy
- Chemoradiotherapy
- Clinical trials

Your doctor will discuss a specific treatment plan with you and answer any questions you may have. You can also go through any questions with your specialist nurse.

Human Papillomavirus School Immunisation Programme

Boys and girls are offered the Gardasil 9 HPV vaccine for free in 1st year in secondary school. The vaccine protects against almost all cases of cervical cancer, 7 out of 10 vaginal, 5 out of 10 vulval cancers, 9 out of 10 HPV related anal cancers and 9 out of 10 cases of genital warts. Two doses of the vaccine are given at 0 and 6 months.

About the Marie Keating Foundation

Following their mother Marie's death in 1998 from breast cancer, the Keating family committed to ensuring men and women in every community in Ireland had access to the necessary information to prevent cancer or detect it at its earliest stages. Their collective aim was "making cancer less frightening by enlightening".

Through its community information service, the Foundation's dedicated nurses have enlightened thousands of people of the causes and risk factors of all cancers. The Foundation is continuing to expand its awareness campaigns on each of the common cancers, at local level through its community outreach approach as well as through national campaigns.

The Foundation supports families with a loved one going through cancer treatment who are struggling financially with a once off payment, through its Comfort Fund. Support is also provided for men and women across Ireland who have come through cancer treatment and are adjusting to the 'new normal' with free six week Survive & Thrive programmes. For anyone who needs ongoing support as a result of a metastatic cancer diagnosis, the Foundation also holds monthly Positive Living meetings.

At the time of her death and all through her illness, we could do nothing to help our Mother who had, all our lives, done everything for us. We, the Keating family have set up this charity in her name to try to help and prevent others going through what Mam went through and what we are still going through to this day. This is also to show that such a wonderful mother and person did not die in vain.

Take care,

The Keating Family



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