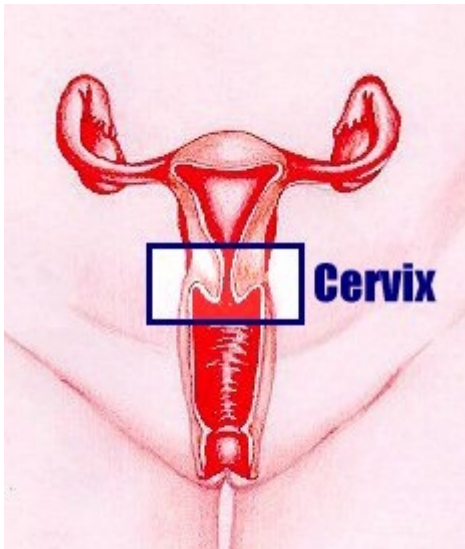


## Women's Cancer Information Project

Coordinated by the European Institute of Women's Health

### Cervical Cancer



Cervical cancer occurs at the [cervix](#) which is the opening to the womb. The highest incidence of cervical cancer occurs in women aged 40-55. Each year in Ireland, over 60 women die of cervical cancer. Nearly 70% of women who die from cervical cancer have not had routine smear tests. The majority of cervical cancer cases can be successfully prevented if detected early enough by regular smear tests.

### SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- The most common symptom is vaginal bleeding after intercourse.
- Bleeding between periods may be also abnormal.
- Offensive vaginal discharge may also be a symptom.

In the early stages of the disease, there may be no obvious signs or symptoms that will tell a woman she is at risk. The only way to detect cancerous cells is by having a regular smear test every 2-3 years.

### RISK FACTORS

- Genital infection with the human papilloma virus (HPV), which in some cases causes genital warts, plays a role in the development of cervical cancer. HPV is passed on during sexual intercourse with an infected partner. Some consider that the use of the condom and the diaphragm can help to provide protection to the cervix from harmful influences such as HPV.
- Sexual activity in early teens.
- Smoking.
- Possible long-term use of oral contraceptives.
- Multiple sex partners for either woman or partner.

## TREATMENT

1: Early cancer (or precancer) is treated with laser treatment. This will cure the cancer, without damaging the womb. 2: Sometimes treatment may involve surgical removal of the cervix and the surrounding tissue, but leaves the ovaries intact. This will leave the woman **able** to have children.

## PREVENTION

1. Have a smear test regularly.
2. Consider using a barrier method of contraception – a condom or a diaphragm.
3. Cut down on smoking or give up altogether.

## THE CERVICAL SMEAR TEST / PAP SMEAR TEST

The cervical smear test is a simple test which shows if there are any changes in the cells of the cervix which may develop into cancer. To take the sample a special instrument called a speculum is inserted into the [vagina](#). This helps open the vagina so the sample can be taken. The doctor will collect a sample of cells from your cervix with a small brush or a tiny wooden spatula. This sample is placed on a slide and sent off to the laboratory to be thoroughly checked. The results are given to your doctor. Cervical cancer is not life-threatening if it is caught early. This is why regular cervical smears are so important. Remember, most women with an abnormal smear test result **do not** have cancer of the cervix.

## WHO SHOULD HAVE THIS TEST?

All women who are or have been sexually active should have a cervical smear test at least once every three years. Women should have their first tests in their mid 20's. The disease can take up to ten years to develop so it is recommended that women continue to be tested until they are 65.

## WHERE CAN I HAVE A CERVICAL SMEAR TEST?

The test is available from family doctors, maternity hospitals, family planning and well woman centres.

***A CERVICAL SMEAR TEST MAY SAVE YOUR LIFE !!!!!***

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