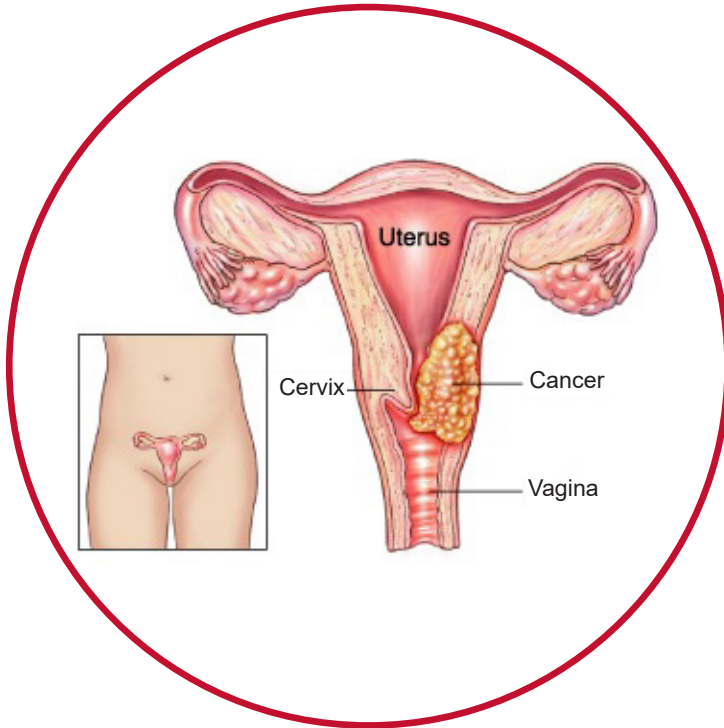


PREVENTION OF CERVICAL CANCER



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Cervical Cancer

Cervix is the lowermost part of the uterus (mouth of the uterus). Cervical cancer is the commonest cause of death among women in developing countries and more than one fifth of all new cases worldwide are diagnosed in India.

Almost 100% of cervical cancer is caused by Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). HPV infection occurs in 70% of sexually active women; more than 90% of infections are cleared within 2 years and less than 1% progress to cancer.

Why have a Cervical Smear Test?

Cervical cancer CAN be avoided! It has a long precancer stage before progressing to cancer and gives us an opportunity to identify it by Pap smear.

If detected in the precancerous stage, it can be treated, the disease can be halted and the majority of cervical cancer cases can be avoided. Unfortunately, during the precancerous stages there are no signs to tell a woman that she may be at risk.

One of the simple ways to detect this is by performing a cervical smear (also called a Pap smear test). If any abnormality is detected on Pap smear, it can be treated, thereby preventing progression to cancer.

90% of the women who died from cervical cancer, did NOT have routine smear tests done. If they had, they would probably be alive today.

What is a Pap smear Test? How is it done?

A smear test is a very simple way of checking the health of the cervix. The smear test is an outpatient procedure where the gynaecologist scrapes some of the cells from the cervix with a brush, which is then sent to the lab for examination. There should be no bleeding at the time of the test.

After microscopic examination, experts can confirm if the cervical cells are normal or not. All sexually active women between the ages of 21 and 65 years should be tested every 3 years. Concomitant testing for HPV along with Pap smear permits the screening interval to be increased to 5 years.

What happens after the test?

The Pap smear test result is usually ready within a week's time. If the smear test is normal (as it is in a majority of cases), then it should be repeated after 3 years.

If the test discloses some abnormality, this implies that some changes have occurred in the cells, which, if left untreated, can develop into cancer in the long run. The management depends on the degree of abnormality and most women are successfully treated.

After treatment, it is necessary to repeat the test at specified intervals. If the subsequent smear tests are normal, then routine 3-yearly screening should be continued. If, however, the subsequent smear tests are not normal and continue to show some abnormalities, then it is necessary to investigate further by colposcopy.

Colposcopy

Colposcopy is a detailed examination of the cervix through a special microscope called a colposcope. A colposcope acts like a magnifying glass with a light and allows the doctor to have a closer look at the cervix.

What happens during Colposcopy?

Colposcopy is an outpatient procedure just like the smear test. A solution is applied to the cervix which will cause any potentially abnormal areas to turn white. The cervix is then viewed through the colposcope, which is placed just outside the vagina. If there are any abnormal areas on the cervix, a tiny sample of tissue is taken (biopsy) and sent to the lab for further testing.

After Colposcopy

There is no need for an overnight stay in the hospital. If a biopsy is done, there might be mild cramping or light bleeding for a few days, which can be relieved by anti-inflammatory medication. It is advisable to abstain from sexual intercourse for a few days after the biopsy. The results of the biopsy will determine the future course of action.

Is there any other prevention strategy?

Vaccination is about prevention of HPV infections while continuation of cervical screening (Pap smear) is vital to detect precancerous changes related to past infection. Ideally, prophylactic vaccinations should be administered to populations immediately before their entry into the period of greatest risk. The recommended age group for vaccination is 11-12 years but can range from 9-26 years.

**Cervical Smear Testing, Colposcopy & Cervical Cancer Vaccine facilities
are available at FERNANDEZ HOSPITAL AND OUTPATIENT CLINICS**