

The HPV Vaccine

The new HPV vaccine can significantly reduce the number of women affected by cervical cancer. The NHS currently covers the vaccination for girls of school age. This means that University students **are not eligible** under the NHS program. You can get the vaccine privately, costing between £300-£450. Speak to your GP about this option: they should be able to write the prescription and administer the vaccine.

The vaccine is effective for women of all ages who are not already infected with HPV. The rationale for providing the vaccine only to school-age girls (the program targets 12-13yr olds) is that once women become sexually active, they are more likely to contract HPV, therefore potentially reducing the effectiveness.

The NHS vaccine (Cervarix®) protects against fewer HPV strains than Gardasil®, the alternative vaccine, leading many GPs to choose privately provided vaccinations for their daughters for maximum protection.

The government's reluctance to protect the health of all women is shameful. If you are shocked by this failure, voice your outrage to the Department of Health (0207 210 4850, dhmail@dh.gsi.gov.uk), and your GP!

Getting support:

Whether you want to talk to someone about HPV specifically or welfare and sexual health in general, find out how to get screened or vaccinated or discuss your options, there are lots of people you can get in touch with:

Your GP will be able to tell you about smear tests, vaccination and sexual health.

The Laurels is a sexual health clinic where you can get a comprehensive sexual health check:
20 Newmarket Road,
Cambridge CB5 8DT, 08456 50 51 52

Vaccines are also available from travel clinics.

www.tellher.com: Information about HPV.

www.immunisation.nhs.uk/Vaccines/HPV:
Lots of information and resources about HPV and the vaccination program.

You can contact the CUSU Women's Officer, Natalie Szarek, for information and support.

womens@cusu.cam.ac.uk

01223 333 313 Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm



HPV

Human Papilloma Virus

cervical cancer
genital warts
smear tests
the vaccine

know the facts

Cervical Cancer, caused by the **Human Papilloma Virus**, is one most common cancers affecting women. Find out what steps you can take to **protect yourself**, and how to improve NHS support for women's health.

What is HPV?

HPV is a virus which infects genital areas, especially the anus and cervix. The virus is most often transferred sexually.

Many cases resolve on their own (90% clear up within two years), but some can develop into complications such as cancer (most commonly known cervical cancer, but also of the anus, vagina, and penis) or genital warts, depending on the strain of HPV.

Cervical cancer can occur when an HPV infection does not clear up and develops into a cancerous growth (this generally happens over several years). Cervical cancer globally is the 2nd most common cancer for women: but it's also highly screenable.

Genital warts can develop from HPV infections which don't clear up. They are not fatal, but have a variety of symptoms and can incur medical costs.

The HP virus can be present in your body for several years before it develops into serious complications. This means it is important to get screened regularly, so that you can prevent complications, or catch them early!

Smear Tests

What do they do?

Smear tests, (also called cervical smear tests, or pap smears) screen for signs of development of growths caused by HPV infection by taking a swab of cells from your cervix. (sound scary? Keep calm and keep reading...)

How do I get one?

Simply call your GP and request one. You should be invited for annual tests from the age of 25, but if you have been or are sexually active, you may want to consider getting one before you are invited. If you request one, your GP should give you one.

How do I know if I should get a smear test?

It is best to talk to your GP about this, but it is ultimately up to you to decide if you would like a smear test. The majority of infections happen before the age of 25, rising from the age of 14. HPV can be transmitted through penetrative, non-penetrative, heterosexual or homosexual sex; chances of infection if you are not sexually active are minimal. The use of a condom decreases the chances of infection, but it is still a possibility.

What happens at a smear test?

Many women harbor a deep fear of smear tests, largely coming from an uncertainty about what actually happens.

The typical smear test experience varies from one practice to another, but in general you can expect:

-The doctor will ask you to lie on your back with your knees up. (Consider wearing a skirt if you are concerned about feeling exposed.)

-They will insert a speculum to gently spread your vaginal passage, so they can access your cervix. Back in the day you could expect cold hands and metal speculum, but things are much friendlier now!

-They will then insert a swab to collect a few cells from your cervix. This may be momentarily uncomfortable, but not painful. Remember to try to relax, as this will make it easier for you and the doctor.

The best time to get a test is in the middle of your period cycle, so the sample is clearer.

The sample will be sent for testing, and in a few weeks' time, you should get your results.

For more info: http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/womens_health/issues_smeartest.shtml