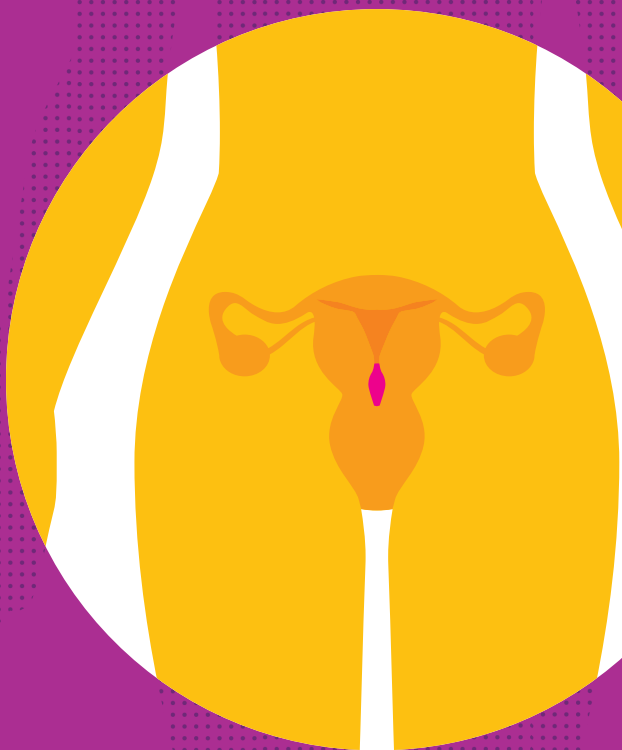


# Cervical Cancer

What you should know

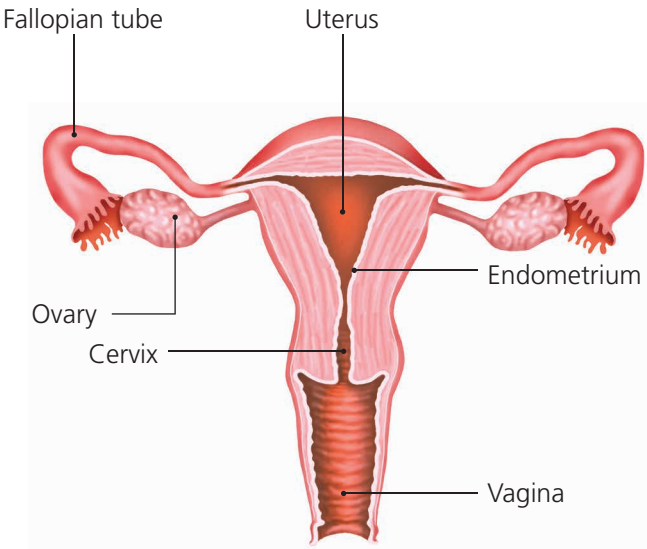


**Irish  
Cancer  
Society**

# What is cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer is when normal cells in the lining of your cervix grow in an abnormal way to form a mass of cells called a tumour.

The cervix is inside your vagina at the lower end of your womb (uterus). It is often called the neck of the womb because it is the opening to the womb from the vagina. The cervix is shaped like a cone and is about 2.5 cm (1 inch) long.



## What increases my risk of cervical cancer?



### **Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)**

Most women who have sex will have HPV at some point in their lives. Normally the infection clears up on its own. HPV infections can lead to abnormal changes in the cells of the cervix. Over time some of these changes can turn into cancer.



### **Smoking**

Chemicals in cigarettes can affect how you fight the HPV infection. For this reason, if you smoke you can have trouble getting rid of the HPV infection. Smoking also increases your risk of abnormal changes (CIN) developing in your cervix.

**Risk factors increase your chance of getting cervical cancer. Having a risk factor doesn't mean you will get cervical cancer. Sometimes people with no risk factors may get the disease.**

## What are the symptoms of cervical cancer?

- Abnormal vaginal bleeding. For example, bleeding in between your periods, after sex or after the menopause.
- A vaginal discharge that may smell unpleasant.
- Discomfort or pain during sex, or in the pelvic area.

**These symptoms can be caused by other things, but always get them checked out.**

# What should I do if I have any symptoms?

If you have any symptoms or changes in your body that you are worried about, it's important to have them checked by your GP (family doctor). The chances are it will not be cancer. Getting your symptoms checked is not wasting anyone's time. The sooner cancer is spotted, the more likely you are to recover from it.

## How is cervical cancer diagnosed?

If your doctor thinks your symptoms need to be investigated, you will have more tests. Tests that can help to diagnose cervical cancer include:



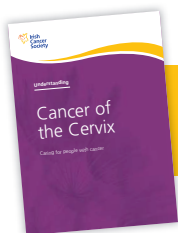
**Physical examination:** Your doctor uses an instrument called a speculum to examine your cervix and see inside it more clearly.



**Colposcopy:** The doctor examines your cervix using a bright light and a colposcope. This is a large microscope that helps him or her to look more closely at the surface of your cervix.



**Biopsy:** The specialist takes tissue samples from your cervix and examines them under a microscope to see if they are abnormal.



If you are diagnosed with cervical cancer our booklet has more information.

## How can I reduce my risk of cervical cancer?



**Have regular smear tests:** This can help to spot any changes to cervical cells before they turn cancerous. If you are aged 25-44 you should have a smear test every 3 years. If you are aged 45-60 you should have a smear test every 5 years.



**Don't smoke:** Not smoking will make it easier for your body to fight an HPV infection and reduce the risk of cancerous changes in the cells in your cervix.



**Get vaccinated against HPV:** The HPV vaccine protects girls from developing cervical cancer when they are adults. This is why the HPV vaccine is offered to all girls in first year in second level schools to protect them from cervical cancer in adulthood.

Visit **[www.HPV.ie](http://www.HPV.ie)** for more information.

**See the end of this leaflet for tips on how to reduce your risk of cancer in general.**



## Can I be screened for cervical cancer?

Testing for cervical cancer when you have no symptoms is called screening.

Screening for cervical cancer involves a doctor or nurse gently putting an instrument called a speculum into your vagina to take a sample of cells from the cervix (neck of the womb). The cells are examined in a laboratory for any changes.

CervicalCheck is the national cervical screening programme. All women aged 25 to 60 are invited to have regular, free cervical checks. For more information see **[www.cervicalcheck.ie](http://www.cervicalcheck.ie)**



# 12 ways to reduce your cancer risk



**Do not smoke**



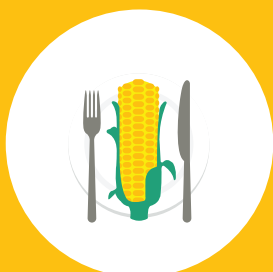
**Avoid second-hand smoke**



**Be a healthy weight**



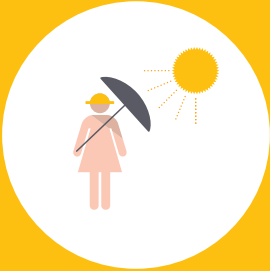
**Be physically active in everyday life**



**Have a healthy diet**



**Avoid alcohol**



**Avoid too much sun**



**Avoid pollutants**



**Get screened for cancer**



**Breastfeed your baby /  
Limit HRT**



**Get vaccinations -  
Hepatitis B for  
babies / HPV for girls**



**Find out if you are  
exposed to radon  
gas in your area**



# Some facts about cervical cancer



Cervical cancer does not form suddenly. Over time, normal cells may change into a pre-cancerous condition called CIN. This can turn into cancer cells if you don't get treatment.



Cervical cancer is not infectious and cannot be passed on to others.

**40s/50s**

Cervical cancer can happen at any age, but it is most common in women in their 40s and 50s.



## How common is cervical cancer?

Around 300 women in Ireland are diagnosed with cervical cancer each year.

# For more information...

If you are worried or have questions about cervical cancer or any cancer...



**Call our Cancer Nurseline**

**Freephone 1800 200 700**



or email [cancernurseline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:cancernurseline@irishcancer.ie)

for confidential advice, support and information.

Visit our Daffodil Centres where our nurses can give you advice about healthy lifestyles and reducing your risk of cancer. To find out where your local Daffodil Centre is, email [daffodilcentreinfo@irishcancer.ie](mailto:daffodilcentreinfo@irishcancer.ie)

Visit our website [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie) for more information on cervical cancer and ways to reduce your risk of cancer.

## Want to stop smoking?

Quitting smoking is one of the best things you can do to reduce your risk of cancer.

If you would like advice or support on quitting, call the HSE Quit Team on CallSave **1800 201 203**, Freetext **QUIT** to **50100** or visit [www.quit.ie](http://www.quit.ie)



**Irish  
Cancer  
Society**