

## CANCER FACTS

# Cervical Cancer

Cervical cancer begins when abnormal cells in the lining of the cervix grow uncontrollably.

## Queensland<sup>1,2</sup>

- 189 Queensland women were diagnosed with cervical cancer in 2017 and 66 women died from the disease.
- On average, women diagnosed with a cervical cancer were 73 per cent as likely to live for another five years compared to the general population.

## Trends in Queensland<sup>2</sup>

- Between 2007 and 2017, cervical cancer diagnosis rates were stable. This followed a 3.6 per cent per year decrease in rates from 1982 to 2006.
- Cervical cancer death rates increased between 2011 to 2017 by 3.6 per cent per year. This followed a decrease in rates by 3.3 per cent per year between 1982 and 2010.

## Australia<sup>3</sup>

- In 2016, 889 women were diagnosed with cervical cancer across Australia.
- There were 232 Australian women who died from cervical cancer in 2018.

## Symptoms<sup>4</sup>

In its early stages, cervical cancer usually has no symptoms. The only way to know if there are abnormal cells in the cervix, which may develop into cervical cancer, is to have a cervical screening test. If symptoms occur, they usually include:

- vaginal bleeding between periods, after menopause or during or after sexual intercourse
- pelvic pain
- pain during sexual intercourse
- an unusual vaginal discharge
- heavier periods or periods that last longer than usual.

## Risk factors<sup>5</sup>

Almost all cases of cervical cancer are caused by an infection with human papillomavirus (HPV), however, there are also other known risk factors.

- Infection with HPV – affects the surface of different areas of the body such as the cervix, vagina and skin. About four out of five people will become infected with at least one type of genital HPV at some time in their lives. There are more than 100 different types of HPV, which affect both males and females. Most people will not know they have HPV as it is usually harmless and doesn't cause symptoms. In most people, the virus is cleared up quickly by our immune system and no treatment is needed. In some women, the infection doesn't go away, and they have an increased risk of developing changes in the cervix.
- Smoking and passive smoking – chemicals in tobacco can damage the cells of the cervix, making cancer more likely to develop in women with HPV.
- Having a weakened immune system – the immune system helps rid the body of HPV. Women with a weakened immune system are at increased risk of developing cervical cancer and need to have more frequent screening. This includes women with the human deficiency virus (HIV) and women who take medicines that lower their immunity. Ask your doctor if this applies to you and how often you should have a screening test.
- Long-term use of oral contraceptive (the pill) – research has shown that women who have taken the pill for five years or more are at increased risk of developing cervical cancer. However, the risk is small and the pill can also help protect against other types of cancer, such as uterine and ovarian cancers.
- Exposure to Diethylstilboestrol (DES) – this is a synthetic form of the female hormone oestrogen. DES was prescribed to pregnant women from the 1940s to the early 1970s to prevent miscarriage. Studies have shown that the daughters of women who took DES have a small but increased risk of developing a rare type of cervical adenocarcinoma.

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## Reducing cancer risk

Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable of all gynaecological cancers, through the HPV vaccination and cervical screening.

### HPV vaccination

The HPV vaccine, Gardasil 9, was developed to replace Gardasil 4 as of 1 January 2018, in the National Immunisation Program. Gardasil 9 protects against nine HPV types which cause around 90 per cent of cervical cancers in women (and the majority of other HPV-related cancers in women), 95 per cent of all HPV-related cancers in men and 90 per cent of genital warts<sup>6</sup>. The vaccine has been proven safe for use. Girls and boys aged 12–13 years can receive the HPV vaccine free of charge as part of the National HPV Vaccination Program. The vaccine is administered two times and the injections should be given at least six months apart.

Read more [here](#).

## National Cervical Screening Program

- The Australian Government's National Cervical Screening Program has changed to improve early detection and save more lives. From 1 December 2017 all women or anyone with a cervix aged between 25 and 74 years are invited to have a Cervical Screening Test every five years.
- Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable cancers. The new Cervical Screening Test is expected to reduce cervical cancer rates and deaths by at least 20 per cent.
- The test is a simple procedure to check the health of the cervix. It looks and feels the same as the Pap test, but tests for HPV.
- For those who have been vaccinated against HPV, it is essential to still participate in regular cervical screening. The combination of the HPV vaccine and regular cervical screening is the best protection against cervical cancer.
- Anyone with symptoms such as unusual bleeding, discharge or pain should see their healthcare professional immediately.
- For more information, visit [cancer.org.au](http://cancer.org.au)

## Changes to everyday behaviours

Cancer Council Queensland recommends that to reduce your overall cancer risk, you quit smoking, maintain a healthy body weight, eat a healthy diet, be physically active, stay SunSmart, limit alcohol, participate in cancer screening programs (if eligible) and report unusual changes to your body to your doctor immediately.

1. Queensland Cancer Register, 2020. Unpublished data (1982–2017).
2. Queensland Cancer Statistics On-Line, 2020. Viertel Cancer Research Centre, Cancer Council Queensland ([qcsol.cancerqld.org.au](http://qcsol.cancerqld.org.au)). Based on data released by the Queensland Cancer Register (1982–2017; released July 2020).
3. Cancer data in Australia (web report), Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), Last updated 02 Jun 2020 <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/cancer/cancer-data-in-australia/contents/summary>.
4. Cervical cancer, Cancer Council (<https://www.cancer.org.au/about-cancer/types-of-cancer/cervical-cancer.html>)
5. Understanding cervical cancer. Cancer Council (<https://www.cancerciv.org.au/downloads/resources/booklets/Understanding-Cervical-Cancer.pdf>)
6. The HPV vaccine. Cancer Council Australia (<http://www.hpvvaccine.org.au/about-the-vaccine/vaccine-background.aspx>)

# Cervical Cancer

## Information and support

### Cancer Council 13 11 20

Being diagnosed with cancer or supporting a loved one can leave you with many questions. We want to help you find the answers. Call Cancer Council's 13 11 20 Information and Support line to talk with one of the team.

Our team can provide you with cancer information, emotional and practical support. We can also refer you to Cancer Council Queensland's support programs and services.

This confidential service is available Monday to Friday 9am-5pm (excluding public holidays).

### Cancer Connect

Cancer Connect is a confidential telephone-based peer support service that connects you, your carer or loved ones with a peer support volunteer who has had a similar cancer experience. You can be matched with a Cancer Connect volunteer based on cancer diagnosis, treatment, family or work issues.

### Cancer Counselling Service

Living with a cancer diagnosis, or supporting someone along the way, is rarely easy. Talking things through with a counsellor or psychologist can help you manage your cancer related concerns.

Our Cancer Counselling Service is available for anyone distressed by cancer at any stage. We deliver counselling via telephone and video, with face to face appointments available in some regional offices. Our team includes nurse counsellors and psychologists trained and experienced in helping people affected by cancer.

### Further information and support



13 11 20



Email



Webchat

**Disclaimer:** The information in this publication should not be used as a substitute for advice from a properly qualified medical professional who can advise you about your own individual medical needs. It is not intended to constitute medical advice and is provided for general information purposes only. Information on cancer, including the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of cancer, is constantly being updated and revised by medical professionals and the research community.

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