

# Understanding Cervical Cancer: Prevention is the key



Cervical cancer continues to pose a substantial global health challenge, with an estimated 660,000 new cases and 350,000 deaths reported worldwide in 2022. However, the burden is particularly acute in India, which accounts for around a fifth of the total cervical cancer cases globally. In India, cervical cancer is the second most common cancer among women, but it is the only cancer which is preventable. The key to combating cancer lies in awareness and access to effective preventive measures.

## How can we prevent this?

1

Early detection is critical, as cervical cancer often goes unnoticed in its early stages. This is where regular cervical screening, typically recommended every 1-3 years for women aged 30-65 depending on the consulting doctor's advice becomes vital.

2

Screenings, like the Pap smear and HPV test, act as a safety net. They detect precancerous changes and the presence of HPV, the human papillomavirus - a major culprit behind cervical cancer. By catching abnormalities early, screenings allow for prompt treatment, significantly reducing the risk of full-blown cancer.

3

The HPV vaccine offers another layer of protection. It works by creating a shield against the strains of HPV most linked to cervical cancer. This vaccine essentially prevents the initial infection that could lead to cancer over a period of time.



**It's important to remember that while cervical cancer directly affects women, vaccinating boys holds equal importance. HPV can cause other cancers in men, such as penile, anal, and throat cancers. Vaccinating boys helps create herd immunity. This means by reducing the overall circulation of the virus in the population, which offers further protection for everyone.**

## Despite progress, some myths persist around cervical screening.

Let's address a few common ones:

- **Myth:** Screening is unnecessary if there are no symptoms.

**Fact:** Early detection is key. Screenings detect precancerous changes before symptoms appear.

- **Myth:** Screening affects fertility.

**Fact:** Screening procedures are safe and do not impact fertility.

- **Myth:** HPV vaccination eliminates the need for screening.

**Fact:** Vaccination reduces risk but doesn't eliminate it. Regular screenings are still essential.

- **Myth:** Post menopausal women don't need screening.

**Fact:** Women up to 65 years may still need screening, especially if they have a history of cervical abnormalities or haven't been regularly screened previously.

**By combining regular cervical screenings with HPV vaccination, we create a powerful defense system against cervical cancer. Continued efforts in education and awareness are crucial to ensure everyone understands and utilizes these preventive measures. Together, we can work towards a future where cervical cancer becomes a story of the past, not a threat of the present.**

**Expert Dr. Geetika Thakur, Consultant - Obstetrician & Gynecologist, Motherhood Chaitanya Hospitals, Sec 44C , Mohali,** echoes this growing trend:

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We are witnessing a welcome surge in HPV vaccination awareness. Women of all ages seeking vaccination, along with parents bringing both daughters and sons for the procedure. This year alone we've vaccinated over 100 women in the first half, surpassing last year's total of 140. The HPV vaccine, regardless of age, is a safe and effective way to significantly reduce cervical cancer risk. It's an investment in your future health. The HPV vaccine is emerging as a true champion in cervical cancer prevention. By preventing the initial HPV infection, it dramatically lowers an individual's lifetime risk. We strongly recommend vaccination for both girls and boys, starting as early as 9-14 years. Early vaccination is key, as its most effective before exposure to the virus.

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