

Public urged to prevent cervical cancer and support Cervical Cancer Awareness Month

The Department of Health (DH) today (January 3) urged members of the public to support Cervical Cancer Awareness Month through learning more about cervical cancer and taking effective precautionary measures against cervical cancer, such as receiving human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccinations and undergoing regular cervical screening.

The International Agency for Research on Cancer of the World Health Organization (WHO) has designated January as Cervical Cancer Awareness Month with an aim to raise public awareness and scale up actions related to cervical cancer, thus eliminating it as a public health problem in the next century. In Hong Kong, cervical cancer was the ninth most common female cancer in 2022, with 522 new cases and 167 deaths.

Most cervical cancers are caused by persistent infection with high-risk HPV. Women are recommended to:

- Receive the HPV vaccine before sexual debut;
- Undergo cervical screening regularly;
- Practise safe sex (e.g. using condoms and avoiding multiple sexual partners) to prevent HPV infection; and
- Refrain from smoking, as it may increase the risk of cervical cancer.

HPV vaccines help prevent cervical cancer and are effective in preventing high-risk HPV, including HPV 16 and 18, with protection rates over 90 per cent. HPV vaccines work best for women who have never been exposed to HPV infection, i.e. before their first sexual encounter. Since the 2019/20 school year, the DH has been providing free HPV vaccinations to eligible Primary Five schoolgirls under the Hong Kong Childhood Immunisation Programme. The DH's School Immunisation Teams provide the first dose of the HPV vaccine to Primary Five female students at their schools, and the second dose will be given to them when they reach Primary Six in the following school year. The second dose coverage rate of HPV vaccination for Primary Six girls in the school year 2022/23 was about 92 per cent.

After reviewing the scientific evidence, updated recommendations from the WHO and overseas experiences in relation to the efficacy and safety of the HPV vaccine, the Scientific Committee on Vaccine Preventable Diseases under the Centre for Health Protection of the DH has recommended the provision of catch-up vaccinations to girls under the age of 18. Therefore, the DH launched a one-off catch-up HPV vaccination programme on December 2, 2024, for female Hong Kong residents born between 2004 and 2008 (i.e. girls aged 18 or below as in 2022, and not covered by the existing programme) to

receive free HPV vaccinations. All participants in this programme must have been registered with eHealth. Details of the programme, which lasts for about two years, can be found on the DH's [website](#).

Many women who are infected with HPV or in the early stages of cervical cancer do not have noticeable symptoms. Therefore, women aged 25 to 64 who have had sexual experience should undergo regular cervical screening. The Population Health Survey 2020-22 conducted by the DH revealed that merely half of the eligible women in Hong Kong had ever been screened for cervical cancer. To further increase the screening coverage, the DH promotes the Cervical Screening Programme to the general public through various channels, such as television, radio, social media, the DH's website and posters. Members of the public can also access information about cervical screening via the "@DH mobile application". Since 2023, the DH has been regularly sending notifications to women of the appropriate age group through the Cervical Screening Information System and the eHealth mobile app to remind them to undergo regular cervical screening.

In Hong Kong, Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs) and Woman Health Centres of the DH, non-governmental organisations and private healthcare providers provide cervical screening services. Common screening tests for cervical cancer include the HPV test of cervical samples collected by healthcare professionals and/or Cytology test (also called cervical smear or Pap smear).

At the same time, the Primary Healthcare Commission is actively promoting the "life course preventive care plan". Based on the core principles of prevention-oriented and whole-person care, a personalised preventive care plan will be formulated to address the health needs of citizens across different life stages with reference to the latest evidence. Family Doctors and primary healthcare professionals will collaborate to provide health advice and education on chronic diseases and cancer screening, as well as healthy lifestyles according to age, sex and personal factors such as family history, including cervical cancer.

Women who wish to receive cervical screening at MCHCs can schedule an appointment through the 24-hour hotline 3166 6631. For further information on cervical cancer and screening, please visit the DH's [website](#).