

Public urged to support Cervical Cancer Awareness Month

The Department of Health (DH) today (January 14) urged members of the public to support Cervical Cancer Awareness Month through increasing their awareness of cervical cancer and its preventive measures.

Cervical Cancer Awareness Month has been designated as every January by the International Agency for Research on Cancer under the World Health Organization, with an aim of reducing the burden of cervical cancer on society and ultimately eliminating the preventable disease through global co-operation by the end of this century.

The local incidence of cervical cancer in Hong Kong has been on an overall decreasing trend in the last two decades (see Annex). There were 520 new cases of cervical cancer reported in 2019, accounting for 3.0 per cent of all new cancer cases in the female population, making it the eighth most common female cancer in Hong Kong. In 2020, 159 females died of cervical cancer, accounting for 2.6 per cent of all female cancer deaths.

Cervical cancer is caused by persistent infection with high-risk human papillomavirus (HPV). Reported risk factors for persistent HPV infection and development of cervical cancer include early first sexual intercourse, multiple sexual partners, tobacco use, chronic immunosuppression (e.g. Human Immunodeficiency Virus-infected individuals and organ transplant recipients), increasing parity, younger age at full-term pregnancy, long-term use of oral contraceptive pills for more than five years and co-infection with sexually transmitted diseases.

Cervical cancer is one of the preventable cancers and is largely preventable through both vaccination and screening for precursor lesions, with appropriate follow-up and treatment. Back in 2004, the DH launched the Cervical Screening Programme (CSP) in collaboration with the healthcare sector and non-governmental organisations to facilitate and encourage women aged between 25 and 64 who ever had sex to receive regular cervical cancer screening. Participating individuals can also register with the Cervical Screening Information System (CSIS) to review their screening records, receive screening reminders, and authorise selected service providers to review their screening records for more co-ordinated care. As of December 30, 2021, more than 630 000 women had registered with the CSIS. Subsidised cervical screening is currently offered at Maternal and Child Health Centres of the DH where eligible persons pay \$100 for each screening. Payment is waived for recipients of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance and holders of the Certificate for Waiver of Medical Charges.

To further encourage regular cervical cancer screening, the DH has also been conducting various health promotion activities, including distribution of health education resources and publicity via various media channels and online social media. Health educational materials are available in different

languages (including Bahasa Indonesia, Hindi, Nepali, Tagalog, Thai and Urdu) for the ethnic minorities to understand the details of the CSP and the services available.

As a primary preventive strategy for the prevention of cervical cancer, starting from the 2019/20 school year, the DH has provided free HPV vaccination to eligible Primary Five and Six female students under the Hong Kong Childhood Immunisation Programme (CIP). The first dose of HPV vaccine is given via outreach by the DH's School Immunisation Teams to Primary Five female students at their schools, and a second dose is given to the girls when they reach Primary Six in the following school year. The latest coverage rate of HPV vaccination in 2020/21 school year for Primary Five and Six female students under the CIP is about 82 per cent.

"Apart from vaccination and regular screening, members of the public are also urged to practise safer sex (e.g. use condoms and avoid having multiple sexual partners) and avoid tobacco smoking, to further reduce the incidence and mortality of cervical cancer," a spokesman for the DH advised.

Further health advice on the prevention of cervical cancer is available at the CSP website (www.cervicalscreening.gov.hk/en/index.html). To know more about Cervical Cancer Awareness Month, please visit iarc.who.int/featured-news/iarc-marks-cervical-cancer-awareness-month-2022.