

Women urged to take up cervical screenings regularly

The Department of Health (DH) today (January 11) urged the general public to support Cervical Cancer Awareness Month through enhancing their knowledge about cervical cancer and taking preventive measures such as cervical screening.

In 2018, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced a call to eliminate cervical cancer by 2100 through global efforts. In Hong Kong, cervical cancer ranked as the seventh most common cancer among women in 2021, resulting in around 600 new cases and 180 deaths.

Persistent infection with cancer-causing human papillomavirus (HPV) may lead to cervical cancer. Women who smoke, engage in sexual activity early, have multiple sexual partners, or have weakened immunity are at increased risk of HPV infection and subsequent development of cervical cancer. Therefore, women are recommended to:

- Receive HPV vaccine before sexual debut;
- Undergo cervical screenings regularly;
- Practise safe sex (e.g. use condoms and avoid having multiple sexual partners); and
- Refrain from smoking.

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 vaccine to Primary 5 school girls through the Hong Kong Childhood Immunisation Programme's school outreach vaccination service. The School Immunisation Teams (SITs) under the Centre for Health Protection provide the first dose of HPV vaccine to Primary 5 female students at their schools, and the second dose will be given to them when they reach Primary 6 in the following school year. The second dose coverage rates of HPV vaccination for Primary 6 girls of school year 2021/22 was 89 per cent, achieving the interim target of 70 per cent coverage set by the Hong Kong Cancer Strategy.

The majority of women infected with HPV, or in the early stages of cervical cancer, do not exhibit noticeable symptoms. According to the Hong Kong Cancer Registry, over 40 per cent of cervical cancer cases were not identified until they had reached an advanced stage. Therefore, it is crucial for women aged 25 to 64 who have had a sexual experience to undergo cervical screening, and do so regularly. However, the [Population Health Survey 2020-22](#) conducted by the DH revealed that merely half of the eligible women had ever been screened for cervical cancer.

Cervical screening services are available at various locations, including the Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs) and Women's Health

Centres operated by the DH, as well as non-governmental organisations and private clinics. Common screening methods include the cytology test (also called Pap smear) and the HPV test of cervical samples collected by healthcare professionals. While HPV testing of a self-collected vaginal sample is also recognised by the WHO, alternative HPV testing of self-collected samples, such as using a urine sample, currently lack robust international scientific evidence.

Women who wish to receive a cervical screening at the MCHC can schedule an appointment through their 24-hour hotline 3166 6631. For further information on cervical cancer and screenings, please visit www.cervicalscreening.gov.hk.