



10th May 2018

Reassurance for women following HPV concerns

SHQ (Sexual Health Quarters) has recently been contacted by a number of women expressing concern their Cervical Screening Test has detected HPV (Human Papilloma Virus).

While the older-style Pap smear looked for any abnormal cervical cell changes, the new Cervical Screening Test looks for the presence of the HPV infection that can cause abnormal cell changes. This allows for monitoring and if needed, treatment of these abnormalities, to prevent cervical cancer.

HPV is a common infection, and 4 out of 5 people will have it at some point in their lifetime (and most won't know about it). HPV is easily passed on through unprotected sexual activity. After you have sex with someone with the virus, HPV is shared between you, and each person's body deals with it in their own way. It is mostly impossible to tell where it came from, or who had it first.

Many people don't realise they carry the virus (ie they have no symptoms), and passing it on is not a deliberate act. People can also develop symptoms years after having sex with someone who has an infection (so it might not be a current partner).

Most HPV infections are naturally cleared by the body's immune system in about two years without causing any problems. If the body does not clear the virus, these abnormal cervical cells can progress and this may lead to cervical cancer. This usually takes as long as 10 to 15 years.

Regular Cervical Screening Tests (for most women this is every five years) are recommended to detect higher-risk types of HPV before they can cause changes in the cervix. All results are followed-up according to current guidelines, and the risk of getting cervical cancer is extremely small.

Vaccination against HPV (Gardasil®) is an effective way to reduce the risk of getting a high risk type of HPV. It doesn't protect people from all of the known types of HPV, but gives very good protection for the most serious types.

If you have any questions about HPV call the Sexual Health Helpline on 9227 6178/1800 198 205.

Media enquiries

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