

# Single test could cut global deaths from cervical cancer

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A one-off test for cervical cancer could reduce deaths in the developing world, according to a study published today in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

The test, which was invented by a researcher at Queen Mary, University of London, detects the human papillomavirus ([HPV](#)), which is the main cause of [cervical cancer](#).

The new research, involving 130,000 women in rural India, showed that the HPV test reduced cervical cancer deaths by 50 per cent.

Cervical cancer is responsible for more than 200,000 deaths worldwide each year. In wealthier countries, screening has made cancer of the cervix a relatively rare disease. But in poorer nations, where there is no screening, the disease continues to claim the lives of thousands of women.

In the UK, women are screened with a smear test every three to five years. But the smear test has proved impractical for the developing world because of the expertise required to analyse the samples and the cost of re-screening every few years.

In the new study, women aged 30 to 59 were given just one screening test, either the smear test, a visual inspection of the cervix or a test for the virus which causes cervical cancer, HPV. There was also a control group of women who were not tested.

Women who were screened with the HPV test were 50 per cent less likely to die of cervical cancer over an eight year period compared with women who were not tested. Smear tests and visual inspection failed to reduce the death rate.

The test's inventor is Professor Attila Lorincz, of Barts and The London School of Medicine and Dentistry part of Queen Mary, University of London. He said: "This landmark study is crucial because it is the final formal proof that HPV tests can save lives and shows definitively that we can reduce deaths by screening women just once."

Professor Lorincz and colleague Dr Paul Eder from Qiagen Inc have recently developed a new type of HPV test called careHPV. CareHPV also detects the cancer-causing virus but it is cheaper and easier to use in rural settings where medical resources are very limited. The test was developed in collaboration with a non-profit organisation called PATH (Seattle, Washington USA) and was funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

The study's lead author, Dr Rengaswamy Sankaranarayanan of the International Agency for Research on Cancer in France, suggests that the new research, combined with the new careHPV test, could help to cut the cervical cancer death rate in poorer countries.

Professor Lorincz added: "Overall, HPV testing seems to be the best, and most cost-effective option for women in poorer nations. These new findings, coupled with the benefits of the careHPV test, offer an immediate opportunity to save lives in the developing world."

Provided by Queen Mary, University of London ([news](#) : [web](#))

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