Enabling women to use home test kits could increase HPV detection

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More high risk cases of human papilloma virus (HPV) could be detected by offering home testing kits to women who do not come forward for cervical screening, according to research published in the British Medical Journal today.

While cervical cancer screening programmes in Western countries have contributed to a decrease in deaths from cervical cancer, one of the major drawbacks remains the number of women who do not come forwards for smears.

Researchers in the Netherlands, led by Professor Chris Meijer from the VU University Medical Centre, investigated whether home testing kits would improve HPV detection rates. It has long been established that some strains of HPV are found in most cases of cervical cancer so early discovery is important.

As part of the Dutch cervical screening programme, PROHTECT, the authors identified 28,073 women who had not responded to two invitations for screening.

Meijer and his team invited 27,792 of these women to use the Delphi Screener device to collect a cervical fluid sample at home and return it to the researchers. The remaining 281 women were recalled for a conventional cervical screening test.

The results show that over a quarter (26%) of the self-sampling group

fulfilled the request, compared with only 1 in 7 (16%) of the recall group.

Participants in both groups whose samples were HPV positive were referred for further tests.

The authors conclude that using home testing kits for detecting HPV is an effective way to target women who do not attend for cervical screening and that it would lead to twice as many cases of cervical cancer being diagnosed compared with the regular screening programme.

Provided by British Medical Journal