

Cervical cancer screening method should be changed, research suggests

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Cervical cancer screening intervals could be extended to five years for women aged 30 and over if the primary screening method was human papillomavirus (HPV) testing, say scientists at Queen Mary, University of London.

The research, published in the <u>British Journal of Cancer</u> today (28 April), found HPV tests are very accurate in identifying early signs of <u>cervical cancer</u>, detecting more serious abnormalities compared to current cytology screening in women aged 30 and over.

Cervical cancer affects around 2,800 women each year in the UK, and it is one of the few cancers that can be prevented through early detection of pre-cancerous cells.

One of the study's authors, John Snow Professor of Epidemiology, Jack Cuzick, said: "Using HPV testing as the primary <u>screening method</u> for cervical cancer would not only mean women could be screened less often but it would also mean efficiency savings for the NHS."

The study recruited more than 11,000 women from 161 family practices around the UK. Two samples were taken from each of the women; one using the conventional cytology screening method and the other was sent for HPV testing.

Results showed the women with HPV negative results had a lower rate of developing pre-cancerous (CIN2+) cells for at least six years compared



with women who recorded a negative cytology result.

Lead author, David Mesher, from the Cancer Research UK Centre for Epidemiology, Mathematics and Statistics at Queen Mary, University of London, said: "The data shows HPV testing offers improved protection from CIN2+ after a negative result compared with the protection afforded from a normal cytology result."

Professor Cuzick added: "There is now an overwhelming case for moving to HPV as the primary screening test for women 30 and over and demonstration projects should start for this now."

* CIN stands for cervical intraepithelial neoplasia - a condition of the cervix, in which <u>abnormal cells</u> are present on the surface of the cervix. Over time, these cells may become cancerous. CIN is classified as 1, 2 or 3, depending on its severity.

More information: D. Mesher et al. "Long-term follow-up of cervical disease in women screened by cytology and HPV testing: results from the HART study", British Journal of Cancer (2010) 1-6.

Provided by Queen Mary, University of London

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