

Cervical screenings could be cut to twice in a lifetime with HPV vaccine

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Women who have had the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine could need only two HPV screening tests for the rest of their lives according to new research being presented at the NCRI Cancer Conference in Liverpool (9 November 2010).

Professor Peter Sasieni, a Cancer Research UK scientist at Queen Mary, University of London, believes the [vaccine](#) may mean women will no longer have to go for screening every three to five years as is the current practice.

Research suggests that the HPV vaccine will prevent at least seven out of

10 cervical cancers and new vaccines currently being evaluated should prevent even more.

It typically takes over 10 years for a cancer to develop after HPV infection. Research shows that cancer caused by HPV types not prevented by the current vaccines take even longer. This could allow the first cervical screen to be safely offered much later than at age 20 or 25.

Professor Sasieni will also outline how testing for cervical cancer-causing strains of the HPV could be a more accurate method of detecting the disease than the current method, the smear test which is designed to look for [abnormal cells](#). He will urge the UK governments to consider making HPV testing the main method of cervical screening* across the health service as a priority.

Professor Sasieni said: “The UK cervical screening programme has done a fantastic job in reducing cervical cancer, but it is based on an old screening test. HPV testing could prevent an even greater proportion of cervical cancer with just half the number of screens over a lifetime. If HPV testing were to be rolled out from next year, it could be used nationally by 2015.

“With continued high coverage of HPV vaccination and targeting of screening resources towards unvaccinated women, cervical cancer should become a truly rare disease.”

Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer among women under the age of 35, and the majority of cases are caused by two strains of HPV, types 16 and 18.

In the UK, girls aged 12 to 13 are offered the [HPV vaccine](#). Girls have three injections over six months given by a nurse. A two year catch up programme also started in autumn 2008 to vaccinate girls aged between

13 and 18.

Dr Lesley Walker, Cancer Research UK's director of cancer information, said: "HPV vaccination has been a huge step towards reducing the number of women that will be diagnosed with [cervical cancer](#) in future years. And the high uptake of the vaccine in the UK has been a real success story.

"This exciting research poses interesting questions for the screening programme in terms of the best way to screen women in the future who have been vaccinated.

"But for now it remains vitally important that all women continue to take up the invitation to go for screening when they receive it."

Provided by Queen Mary, University of London

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