

Cervical cancers rise in young women

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(Medical Xpress) -- The incidence of cervical cancer in women in their 20s has risen by over 40 per cent between 1992 and 2006 in England, despite the overall incidence of cervical cancer dropping by 30 per cent, according to research* that will be presented at the annual National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) Cancer Conference in Liverpool which starts tomorrow (Sunday).

The research – funded by Cancer Research UK – looked at overall trends in cervical cancer incidence in women aged between 20 and 79 years from 1982 to 2006.

The findings show that – after initially dropping following the introduction of cervical screening in England – the number of women aged between 20 and 29 diagnosed with cervical cancer is now rising in most areas of the country. Yet, for all other age groups, the number of women developing the disease has fallen over the same period.

Between 1992 and 1996 around five women aged 20-29 years in every 100,000 (963 cases, around 192 per year) were diagnosed with cervical cancer. This increased to around six per 100,000 between 2002 and 2006 (988 cases, around 197 per year).

Most women in the study would have been first invited for screening from the age of 20 and after 2003 women were invited from the age of 25**.

In comparison in women aged 50-79 years the incidence dropped from

around 17 per 100,000 (6263 cases) between 1992 and 1996 to just over 10 per 100,000 (4089 cases) during 2002 and 2006.

And the latest figures for 2007 - 2008 show that the rising trend for 20 to 29 year olds is continuing with around nine women in every 100,000 (606 cases, 303 per year) now developing cervical cancer.

Cervical screening detects early changes in the cervix which can be treated before they progress into cancer.

Robert Alston, study author and Cancer Research UK scientist from the University of Manchester, said: “Our results show that although numbers getting cervical cancer are dropping in the immediate years after cervical screening began, the numbers of women in their 20s now developing the disease have been rising since the early 90s.”

Smoking is a known risk factor for cervical cancer as chemicals in cigarette smoke can damage cells in the cervix making them less able to fight off infections and protect against the disease developing.

Robert Alston, added: “Crucially our findings demonstrate the importance of the HPV vaccination programme and for as many women over 25 as possible to go for cervical screening.”

Hazel Nunn, head of evidence and health information at Cancer Research UK, said: “These figures show just how crucial it is for all 12-13 year-old girls to have the HPV vaccination. Human papilloma virus (HPV) is a very common infection and the major cause of [cervical cancer](#). The HPV vaccine protects against two strains of the infection and is most effective when given to women before they are exposed to the virus.

“The vaccine is available for no cost to all 12-13 year old girls and is

usually given at school. Older women can pay to have the vaccine if they wish.

“Whatever your age, if you have any bleeding between periods, during sex or after the menopause, you should go to your GP.”

More information: * View the conference abstract [here](#).

Increasing rates of cervical cancer in young women in England: an analysis of national data 1982–2006. Foley, Alston, Birch et al. British Journal of Cancer (2011) 105, 177–184. [doi:10.1038/bjc.2011.196](https://doi.org/10.1038/bjc.2011.196)

**In October 2003 the age that women are first invited to cervical screening was changed to 25 this is because the available evidence shows that cervical screening in women aged 20-24 is much less effective in preventing cancer. Cervical screening detects a precancerous condition so that women who test positive and are treated do not appear in incidence figures.

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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