

World Cancer Day 2024: 5 ways to prevent cervical cancer and all about pap smears and HPV tests

On World Cancer Day 2024, here's all you need to know about the importance of cervical cancer screening, pap smears, HPV tests and 5 ways to prevent it



World Cancer Day is celebrated globally on February 04, to raise awareness about cancer and to encourage its prevention, detection and treatment. Cervical cancer is a significant global health concern, affecting women of all ages, backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses. Cervical cancer is still very common in India, where it has a high incidence and fatality rate but women may empower themselves to lower their risk and identify possible problems early on by arming themselves with knowledge and taking preventative action. (Photo by Shutterstock)



The World Health Organization (WHO) projected in 2020 that 3,42,000 fatalities and 6,04,000 new cases of cervical cancer will occur worldwide each year, making it the fourth most common malignancy among women. It is extremely concerning that India is home to about one-fourth of all new instances of cervical cancer worldwide each year, with a nearly one-third fatality rate. Nearly 90% of newly reported cases and fatalities in 2020 occurred in low- and middle-income countries. High-income countries have awareness campaigns in place to help girls (often aged 9–14) receive the HPV vaccination in addition to routine screenings for the identification and treatment of precancerous lesions in women. (Representative Image/Shutterstock)



Talking about the causes of cervical cancer in an interview with Zarafshan Shiraz of HT Lifestyle, Amol Naikawadi, Joint Managing Director and Preventive Healthcare Specialist at Indus Health Plus, highlighted the risk factors as –

1. Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Infection: Cervical cancer is mostly caused by ongoing infection with high-risk HPV strains. Sexually transmitted infections like HPV infections can be contracted through specific behaviours including having several sexual partners and making early sexual debuts.
2. Lack of Regular Screening: The high death rate is mostly caused by the low prevalence of routine cervical cancer screening. Regular screenings, like HPV tests and Pap smears, can identify abnormalities early on and allow for prompt intervention.
3. Limited Vaccination Coverage: Cervical cancer has been shown to be prevented by HPV vaccinations; nevertheless, vaccination rates in India are still below ideal levels. The incidence of the illness can be considerably decreased with greater access to immunisation programmes and increased knowledge about them. According to him, the preventive measures include -(Photo by Anna Tarazevich on Pexels)



1. Vaccination: One effective method of preventing cervical cancer is HPV vaccination. For optimum efficacy, vaccination campaigns should target young girls prior to their first sexual experience. To increase the immunisation rate, public awareness campaigns and government actions are essential. (Representative Photo)



2. Regular Screening: Regular screenings, including as HPV tests and Pap smears, are essential for early detection. Women above the age of 21 years of age should get screened on a regular basis in every 3years, as recommended by medical authorities. More screening services should be more widely available, particularly in rural regions. (File Photo)



3. Encouraging Healthy Lifestyles: Encouraging a healthy lifestyle can lower the risk of cervical cancer and improve general well-being. Women's health can benefit from activities like consistent exercise, eating a balanced diet, and abstaining from tobacco. (Photo by Unsplash)



4. Abstain from Smoking: There is a correlation between smoking and an increased risk of cervical cancer. Tobacco contains harmful chemicals that can damage cervical cells and increase susceptibility to HPV infection. Giving up smoking has several other health benefits in addition to lowering the risk of cervical cancer. (Photo by Shutterstock)



5. Practice Safe Sex: To lower the risk of HPV transmission safe sexual practice should be adopted eg- condoms. Restrict the number of sexual partners you have because it raises your risk of HPV exposure. For even more protection, HPV vaccination should be discussed with your physician. There is a need for coordinated efforts to lessen the burden of cervical cancer on Indian women because it is a disease that may be prevented if detected early. In order to eliminate cervical cancer as a serious threat to public health, we must all support immunisation, routine screenings, health education, and better access to healthcare. A key component of realising this objective will be providing women with the knowledge and resources they need to take preventative action. (File Photo)