

Information leaflet on

Pre-Cancerous Abnormalities on the Cervix, Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) & Smoking



What are Pre-cancerous abnormalities?

Pre-cancerous abnormalities are not cancer. They are abnormalities that occur on the cervix which gives you an abnormal smear result. This usually means there are pre-cancerous cells on the cervix. Pre-cancerous cells are treatable.

What is HPV?

HPV is a virus that is transferred by skin to skin contact, however it can lie dormant for a long time. This can cause normal cells on infected skin to turn abnormal. In most cases, the body fights off HPV naturally and the infected cells return to normal. However persistent infections with high risk HPV types can cause cell abnormalities and according to the National Cancer Institute (2011) persistent high risk HPV infections are now recognised as the cause of essentially all Cervical Cancers⁽¹⁾.

How does Smoking affect my smear result?

Smoking depresses the body's immune system. If you have a suppressed immune system, the Langerhans cells which are located in the cervix are less able to fight off the HPV infection and protect the cervical cells from the genetic changes

that can lead to cancer. According to the National Health Service Cervical Screening Programme (NHSCSP) Women who smoke are about twice as likely to develop Cervical Cancer as Non-smokers⁽²⁾. They suggest this may be because smoking is associated with high risk health behaviours or because it may suppress the immune system therefore allowing the persistence of high risk HPV Infection. A study undertaken in America showed convincing evidence that, women who smoke maintain cervical HPV Infections longer and are less likely to clear the infection than women who have never smoked⁽³⁾.

How does Smoking affect HPV?

Researchers from Cancer Research have found that if a woman has a high risk type of HPV and smokes they are twice as likely to have pre-cancerous cells in their cervical screening test or to get cervical cancer⁽⁴⁾.

Smoking Tobacco

Smoking Tobacco increases your risk of getting cervical cancer. The risk increases with the more cigarettes you smoke a day and the younger your age when you started smoking also makes it harder to treat abnormal cells on your cervix. It's never too late to stop smoking but the sooner you stop the better (2017)⁽⁵⁾.

References

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<https://bwc.nhs.uk/privacy-policy>

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