Journal of Womens Health, Issues and Care

Opinion Article A SCITECHNOL JOURNAL

# Cervical Cancer: Epidemiology, Prevention and Management Strategies in the Perspective of HPV Infections

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**Received date:** 23 September, 2024, Manuscript No. JWHIC-24-156584;

**Editor assigned date:** 25 September, 2024, PreQC No. JWHIC-24-156584 (PQ);

**Reviewed date:** 09 October, 2024, QC No. JWHIC-24-156584;

**Revised date:** 17 October, 2024, Manuscript No. JWHIC-24-156584 (R);

**Published date:** 25 October, 2024, DOI: 10.4172/2325-9795.1000523.

## Description

Cervical cancer is one of the most common types of cancer affecting women globally. It occurs in the cervix, the lower part of the uterus that connects to the vagina. Most cervical cancers are caused by persistent infection with high-risk types of the Human Papillomavirus (HPV), a group of more than 200 related viruses. HPV is typically transmitted through sexual contact and certain strains, particularly HPV types 16 and 18, are known to cause the majority of cervical cancer cases. While cervical cancer is largely preventable through vaccination and early detection, it remains a significant public health issue, especially in low and middle income countries where access to screening and preventive care may be limited.

The development of cervical cancer is a gradual process. HPV infection, in most cases, does not cause symptoms and is cleared by the immune system within one to two years. However, in some cases, the virus persists and causes changes in the cells of the cervix. Over time, these cellular changes can progress from mild abnormalities to more severe dysplasia and eventually to invasive cervical cancer if not detected and treated early. This progression is slow, often taking several years, which provides an opportunity for early intervention through regular screening.

The primary method for detecting cervical cancer is the pap smear, which involves collecting cells from the cervix to check for abnormalities. In recent years, the introduction of HPV testing alongside Pap smears has further improved early detection. HPV testing can identify the presence of high-risk strains of the virus before cervical changes become noticeable. Early detection of precancerous changes through regular screening is vital because it allows for the removal of abnormal cells before they develop into cancer. In addition to pap smears and HPV tests, visual inspection with acetic acid is used in some low-resource settings as a cost-effective screening method.

Despite the availability of screening and vaccination, cervical cancer remains a leading cause of cancer-related deaths among women worldwide. The high burden of cervical cancer in developing countries is primarily due to limited access to effective screening programs, lack of awareness and cultural barriers. Many women in these regions are diagnosed at later stages, when the cancer has spread and treatment options are limited. In contrast to high-income countries where regular screening and vaccination programs have led to a significant reduction in cervical cancer incidence and mortality.

Vaccination against HPV has revolutionized the prevention of cervical cancer. The introduction of vaccines like Gardasil and Cervarix has made it possible to prevent infection with the most common cancer-causing strains of HPV. These vaccines are most effective when administered before exposure to the virus, typically recommended for girls aged 9 to 14 years. However, vaccination is also recommended for young women and men up to the age of 26, as it provides protection against several HPV strains. Vaccination programs have shown results in reducing the prevalence of HPV infections and, consequently, the incidence of cervical cancer, particularly in countries with established vaccination programs.

Treatment for cervical cancer depends on the stage at diagnosis. For early-stage cervical cancer, surgery, such as a cone biopsy or hysterectomy, is commonly performed to remove the cancerous tissue. In more advanced stages, a combination of surgery, chemotherapy and radiation therapy may be required. Chemotherapy and radiation are used to target cancer cells that have spread beyond the cervix. In cases where the cancer has metastasized, treatment focuses on palliative care to manage symptoms and improve quality of life. The prognosis for cervical cancer is highly dependent on the stage at diagnosis, with early-stage cancers having a significantly better prognosis than those diagnosed at later stages.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, cervical cancer is a preventable disease, with HPV vaccination and early detection through regular screening playing key roles in reducing its impact. While significant progress has been made in high-income countries, efforts must be intensified in low- and middle-income nations to ensure that all women have access to the tools necessary for prevention, early detection and treatment. By continuing to promote vaccination, screening and timely interventions, can significantly reduce the global burden of cervical cancer and improve the health and well-being of women worldwide. The elimination of cervical cancer as a public health problem is possible with continued global efforts, including the expansion of HPV vaccination programs, improving screening coverage and ensuring timely access to treatment for women in need.

***Citation:*** *Kumpogan O (2024) Cervical Cancer: Epidemiology, Prevention and Management Strategies in the Perspective of HPV Infections. J Womens Health 13:5.*