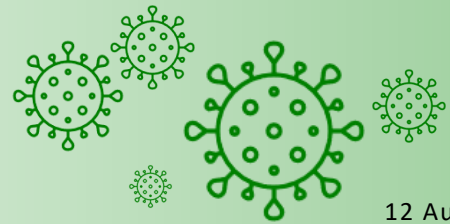




COVID CORNER

Exploring the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on our lives



12 August 2022

COVID and cervical cancer

What is cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer develops when the cervix (the lower end of the womb) becomes infected with cancer cells. It is the second most common cancer— and has the highest death rate—among South African women. The Cancer Association of South Africa states that 1 in every 42 women has a lifetime risk of cervical cancer.

What causes cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer is mainly caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV lives on the skin and can be transmitted through skin-to-skin and sexual contact.

How can we prevent cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable cancers and can be treated very successfully if it is detected early enough. For this reason, all women who are sexually active should have regular PAP smears. This is a painless procedure which scrapes cells from the cervix to examine under a microscope.

Any abnormal results must be followed-up immediately. The gap between screening and treatment is very high in South Africa, contributing to our high cancer death rate.

Other risk factors for cervical cancer are:

- Being overweight
- Being inactive
- Alcohol abuse
- Poor eating habits
- Smoking
- Exposure to chemicals
- HIV and other STIs

As well as regular PAP smears, you can reduce your risk by:

- Delaying sexual debut
- Reducing your number of sexual partners
- Using condoms

Medical male circumcision helps to reduce HIV and HPV in both men and women.

How has COVID impacted cervical cancer diagnosis and treatment?

COVID has disrupted healthcare services like cancer screening and treatment. This includes cervical cancer prevention programmes, like HPV vaccination. Women have also borne the brunt of the economic impact of COVID, meaning many cannot access healthcare due to a lack of financial resources, transport and child-care. The fear is that this will increase the rate of cervical cancer around the world.



Fast Facts

- Cervical cancer has the highest death rate among South Africa women.
- Early detection is essential for the best chance of successful treatment.
- PAP smears are available at most CANSA Care Centres across South Africa for R380 (which includes breast screening).
- The National Department of Health Clinic provide PAP smears free of charge to women three times in their lifetime: when they turn 30, 40 and 50.

Want to find out more?

Cancer Association of South Africa:
<https://cansa.org.za/eliminate-cervical-cancer-through-early-detection/>

Signs & symptoms of cervical cancer:
<https://www.westerncape.gov.za/general-publication/cervical-cancer>

COVID and cervical cancer:
<https://www.who.int/news-room/commentaries/detail/covid-19-is-the-wakeup-call-for-health-equity-let-s-use-it-to-help-women-rise-from-the-nightmare-of-cervical-cancer>



Ask Dr M

Do you still have questions?
 Call us on
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