

For further help and advice contact your local GP or visit:

[www.nhs.uk/smokefree](http://www.nhs.uk/smokefree)

Smokefree National Helpline: Freephone **03001231044**

[www.facebook.com/nhssmokefree](https://www.facebook.com/nhssmokefree)

LiveWellDorset: Freephone **0800840 8401628**

or the Local phone **01305 233105**

Visit [www.livewelldorset.co.uk](http://www.livewelldorset.co.uk)

Email [queries@livewelldorset.co.uk](mailto:queries@livewelldorset.co.uk)

Other helpful websites are:

[www.jostrust.org.uk](http://www.jostrust.org.uk)

[www.cancerresearchuk.org](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org)



University Hospitals Dorset  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Smoking and cervical cancer: The facts



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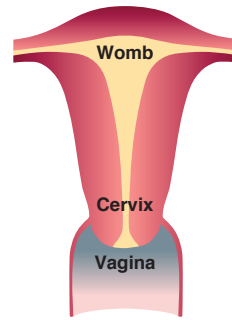
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## What is cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer forms in the tissue between the womb and vagina, known as the cervix. Often there aren't any symptoms and it's typically preceded by precancerous changes, which are detected by regular cervical smears. Less than one in 10 women will have an abnormal smear, and only a small number of these will go on to become a cancer. Therefore cervical cancer is largely preventable and, with early detection, treatable in women undergoing regular smears.



## What causes cervical cancer?

Almost all cases of cervical cancer are caused by the persistent infection with the human papilloma virus (HPV). HPV is extremely common affecting four in every five people during their lifetime, normally without any symptoms. It's passed on by sexual contact and as with the cold virus is normally cleared by the body's immune system. In a small minority of people the body is unable to clear the virus; this can increase the chances of developing abnormalities in the cervix and could potentially develop into cervical cancer if left untreated.

## Why does smoking matter?

Smoking affects how well the immune system works and therefore its ability to clear the HPV virus, leading to persistent infection. In addition, some of the chemicals in cigarettes have been found to directly cause abnormal changes in the cervix. Women who smoke are two to five times more likely to develop abnormalities of the cervix than non-smokers.

As well as affecting the cervix, HPV infection and smoking increase the chances of abnormalities in other tissues including the skin around the vagina (vulva) and anus.

Studies show the heavier and longer someone has smoked the greater the risk of cervical abnormalities and cervical cancer. The evidence of the effects of women exposed to passive cigarette smoke is less clear.

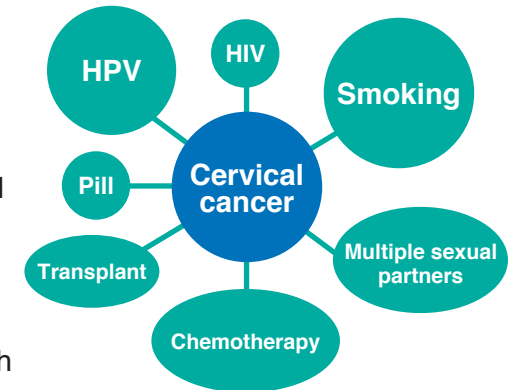


## Will quitting help?

Stopping smoking appears to help reduce the risk of recurrence of some pre-cancerous changes and, in some situations, allows some changes to return to normal. Even reducing the amount someone smokes has been found to reduce the chance of recurrence and severity of abnormal changes in the cervix. Stopping smoking can also help reduce the risk of other health problems such as lung, throat and mouth cancer, heart disease, stroke and pre-cancer and cancer of the vulva and vagina.

## Are there any other risk factors?

Anything that affects how well the immune system works can increase the risk of persistent HPV infection and cervical abnormalities. Certain infections, medical problems and medications can also increase the risk. Long term use of the combined oral contraceptive pill slightly increases the risk, but generally its benefits far outweigh this. The number of sexual partners also increases the risk of HPV infection.



There are no known genetic causes for cervical cancer; a family history doesn't increase the risk. There is no association with alcohol, drug use or ethnicity.

## How can I prevent cervical cancer?

The most effective way to reduce the risk is by attending regular cervical screening, which allows for early detection and treatment of pre-cancerous and cancerous changes. A national vaccination programme is available for teenage girls and can reduce cervical cancer by around 70% by protecting against HPV infections.

Stopping smoking can also help reduce the risk. Studies show that you're up to four times more likely to quit successfully if you use a combination of stop smoking medicine and specialist help and support from your local Stop Smoking Service.