



Cervical cancer screenings, at no cost, for foreign domestic workers
Limited screenings available on a first-come, first-served basis

General Cervical Cancer FAQ

What is the Helping our Helpers programme?

Helping our Helpers is a programme run by the Society for Colposcopy and Cervical Pathology of Singapore which offers cervical cancer screenings, at no cost, for foreign domestic workers in Singapore.

Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer affecting women in Philippines, Indonesia, India and Myanmar.¹

By addressing the gaps in education and access to screening, we hope to lower the incidence of cervical cancer, so women can lead productive lives within the family and society.

Helping our Helpers pilot programme offers 200 women aged between 30 - 65 cervical cancer testing at no cost using human papillomavirus (HPV) DNA tests.

Limited screenings available on a first-come, first-served basis.

What is cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer is a type of cancer that starts in the cervix, which is the lower part of the uterus. The cervix is made up of millions of cells. Changes can occur in these cells and, if left untreated, can develop into cervical cancer. Worldwide, cervical cancer is the fourth most common type of cancer in women.²

What is pre-cancer?

Pre-cancer is when changes first appear in the cervix before cervical cancer develops. With early detection and appropriate treatment, most cases of pre-cancer can be prevented from progressing to cervical cancer.³

What causes cervical cancer?

More than 99% of cases of cervical cancer are caused by HPV infection.⁴ HPV infection is very common. In fact, 4 in 5 women are exposed to it at some point in their lives.⁵ There are more than 100 different types of HPV, of which 14 are considered high-risk with respect to developing cervical cancer.^{6,7} Of these 14 high-risk types, HPV 16 and 18 cause 70% of all cervical cancer.⁸ Women with HPV 16 or 18 are 35 times more likely to develop cervical pre-cancer than those without HPV.⁴

How is HPV contracted?

Anyone who had been sexually active can get HPV - even if you have only had one sexual partner or even if you use condoms. HPV can live in the body for more than 10 years with no symptoms until cervical pre-cancer develops and advances so you could have the virus even if it has been many years since you have had sexual contact.

Why is testing for high-risk HPV important?

HPV is the leading cause of cervical cancer, responsible for 99% of all cases.⁴ However, HPV infections often have no symptoms so the only way for a woman to know if she has the virus is through testing.

A high-risk HPV test can tell the doctor whether a patient is at risk of pre-cancerous changes in the cervix.

Who should be screened for HPV?

Women 30 - 65 years of age who have been sexually active should be tested for HPV. Unless a woman is tested for HPV, it is unlikely she will know that she has the virus as there are usually no symptoms.

Testing for HPV allows women to know their risk of developing cervical cancer and enables their doctor to manage and prevent the disease from developing. Early detection of cervical cancer in the pre-cancer stage can lead to more effective treatment, and ultimately, save lives.

How is a HPV test conducted?

An HPV test is a simple test that is done in the same way as a Pap smear. A test for HPV is generally carried out by a general practitioner or gynaecologist.

If I test positive for HPV, does that mean I have cervical cancer?

It is important to understand that testing positive for HPV does not mean you definitely have cervical cancer; however it means that you are at a higher risk of developing the disease.

What should I do if I test positive for HPV?

A healthcare professional will advise on the next steps if you test positive for HPV 16 and/or 18. Further investigation may be required.

What does it mean if I test negative for HPV?

If you test negative for HPV, it means you are at low risk of developing cervical cancer.⁴ Depending on the recommendations from your doctor, you should return for re-testing in 3 - 5 years.

Overall, a negative high-risk HPV test means that you are very unlikely to develop cervical cancer over the next 5 years.⁹

References: 1. Prevalence Worldwide in 2012. Retrieved 14 December 2017 from http://globocan.iarc.fr/Pages/fact_sheets_cancer.aspx 2. IARC. Globocan 2012: Estimated Cancer Incidence, Mortality and Prevalence Worldwide in 2012. Retrieved 14 December 2017 from http://globocan.iarc.fr/Pages/fact_sheets_cancer.aspx 3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Cervical Cancer. www.cdc.gov. Retrieved 14 December 2017 from http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/pdf/cervical_facts.pdf 4. Wright TC Jr, Stoler MH, Sharma A, et al. Evaluation of HPV-16 and HPV-18 genotyping for the triage of women with high-risk HPV cytology negative results. *Am J Clin Pathol*. 2011;136:578-586. 5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Basic Information about HPV and Cancer. Available at: http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/hpv/basic_info/ [last accessed March, 2016]. 6. Kari P Braaten, M. (2008). Human Papillomavirus (HPV), HPV-Related Disease, and the HPV Vaccine. *Reviews in Obstetrics and Gynecology*, [online] 1 (1), p.2. Available at: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2492590/> [last accessed March, 2016]. 7. de Sanjose S, Quint WG, Alemany L, et al. Human papillomavirus genotype attribution in invasive cervical cancer: a retrospective cross-sectional worldwide study. *Lancet Oncol* 2010; 11:1048-1056. 8. Schiffman M, Castle PE, Jeronimo J, Rodriguez AC, Wacholder S. Human papillomavirus and cervical cancer. *Lancet* 2007; 370(9590):890-907. 9. New Strategies for HPV-based Cervical Screening; *Womens Health (Lond Engl)*. 2013 Sep; 9(5): 10.2217/whe.13.48. doi: 10.2217/whe.13.48 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3880859/>