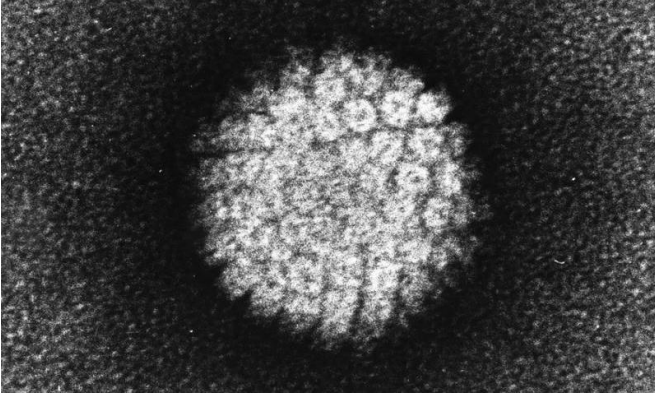


HPV jab means women only need 3 cervical screens in a lifetime

10 November 2017



Electron micrograph of a negatively stained human papilloma virus (HPV) which occurs in human warts. Credit: public domain

Women may only need three cervical screens in their lifetime if they have been given the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine, according to a new study published in the *International Journal of Cancer* today (Friday).

The Cancer Research UK-funded team from Queen Mary University of London (QMUL), found that three screens at 30, 40 and 55 would offer the same benefit to vaccinated women as the 12 lifetime screens currently offered in England.

The results are based on how the HPV vaccine and the improved cervical [screening](#) programme will work best together. The new programme called HPV primary testing is set to be introduced in England by December 2019. It means that cervical samples are tested for HPV but only checked for abnormal cells if the virus is found. The current test checks for abnormalities first, which is less efficient.

Scotland and Wales are also preparing their own plans to introduce this new HPV test.

Since 2008, the HPV vaccine has been offered to schoolgirls aged 11-13 across the UK. This group is now reaching the age for their first cervical screening invitation. This new research shows that these women can still be effectively protected from [cervical cancer](#) with fewer screens, which could also save the NHS resources.

Professor Peter Sasieni, Cancer Research UK's screening expert and lead author based at QMUL, said: "The NHS should benefit from the investment that it's made by introducing the vaccination programme. These women are far less likely to develop cervical [cancer](#) so they don't need such stringent routine checking as those at a higher risk. This decision would free up resources for where they are needed most. The change in the screening system is a unique opportunity to reassess how often women are invited for cervical screens during their lifetimes."

HPV infects most people at some point. Most infections go away on their own, but if an infection is not cleared it can go on to cause cervical cancer. Without HPV infection there would be almost no cervical cancer.

The current HPV vaccine protects women against the most dangerous forms of HPV significantly reducing the chance of developing cervical cancer. As the risk of cervical cancer is considerably reduced, the study suggests that the number of screens should be decreased accordingly, avoiding unnecessary procedures for women.

The study also suggests that unvaccinated women should only need seven lifetime screens when the new screening test comes in, five fewer than is currently standard.

Dr Julie Sharp, head of health information at Cancer Research UK said: "This is great news for women. The cervical screening programme is already very successful, and has led to a dramatic

fall in deaths from the disease since its introduction. While we hope to see these improvements to the screening programme in the future, it's important that [women](#) continue to take up invitations for cervical screening. So if you're all set for your next screen, keep that appointment."

More information: Rebecca Landy et al, What cervical screening is appropriate for women who have been vaccinated against high risk HPV? a simulation study, *International Journal of Cancer* (2017). [DOI: 10.1002/ijc.31094](https://doi.org/10.1002/ijc.31094)

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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