

What is cancer?

The body is made up from millions of cells that are constantly dying and being replaced. Normally, cells divide in an orderly and controlled way. Cancer occurs when a cell divides and multiplies too rapidly. This produces a lump of abnormal cells known as a tumour. Tumours are either benign (non-cancerous) or malignant (cancerous). There are 200 different types of cancer and early detection can greatly increase the chances for successful treatment.

Ovarian Cancer

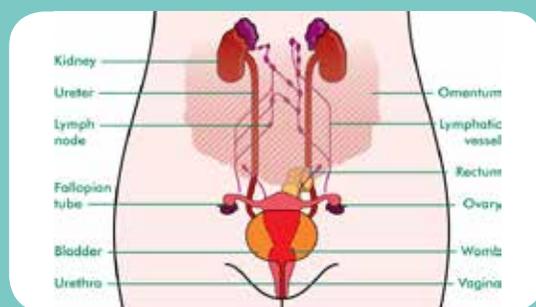
Ovarian cancer affects more than 6,500 women in the UK each year. It is the fifth most common cancer among women after breast cancer, bowel cancer, lung cancer and cancer of the uterus (womb). Ovarian cancer is most common in women who have had the menopause (usually over the age of 50), but it can affect women of any age.

The Ovaries

Approximately 163 females in Northern Ireland are diagnosed with ovarian cancer and over 117 lives are lost each year to the disease. **Smear tests do not detect ovarian cancer.**

The ovaries are 2 small, oval-shaped organs, one on each side of the body and are part of the female reproductive system. They are in the lower part of the abdomen, which is known as the pelvis.

Other organs are very close to the ovaries (see diagram).



These include:

- The ureter, which drains urine from the kidney to the bladder
- The bladder
- The back passage (rectum)
- The omentum - a membrane which surrounds all of the pelvic and abdominal organs and keeps them in place. It is also called the peritoneum.
- A collection of lymph nodes
- The womb

Symptoms of Ovarian Cancer

As the symptoms of ovarian cancer can be similar to those of other conditions, it can be difficult to recognise. **However, there are early symptoms to look out for, such as:**

- Persistent bloating
- Pain in the pelvis and lower stomach
- Unexplained tiredness

Other symptoms include:

- Loss of appetite/feeling full quickly
- Needing to pass urine more often or more urgently
- Back pain
- Changes in bowel habits

If you have these symptoms for a month or on at least 12 days in a month you should consult your GP.

For more information please contact **028 9080 3344** or email **info@actioncancer.org**

Risk Factors for Ovarian Cancer

The cause of ovarian cancer is unknown however there are a number of factors that can increase your risk.

Age

The majority of cases occur in women over the age of 40; however it is possible to be affected by ovarian cancer from the age of 20 onwards.

Family history

Most ovarian cancers are due to gene changes that develop during a woman's life and are not inherited. But about 1 in 10 ovarian cancers (10%) are caused by an inherited faulty gene. Faulty inherited genes that increase the risk of ovarian cancer include BRCA1 and BRCA2. These genes also increase the risk of breast cancer.

If you have a mother, sister or daughter who have had ovarian cancer or breast cancer you may be more at risk of developing ovarian cancer than other women in the population. If your relatives were under 50 years old when their cancers were diagnosed, it is more likely that their cancer is due to an inherited faulty gene.

Childbirth

Women who have given birth have a lower risk of ovarian cancer than women who have not.

Detection

At the moment there is no reliable screening test for detecting ovarian cancer in the general population, however there are clinical trials looking into developing such screening.



The following tests may be carried out to check for ovarian cancer when there are concerns:

- **Internal examination**
- **A blood test for CA125** - It's normal to have some CA125 in the blood, but the level may be higher in women with ovarian cancer
- **Transvaginal ultrasound scan** - A small device is placed into your vagina. As before the device produces sound waves which are then converted into a picture by a computer.
- **CT (CAT) Scan** - A series of x-rays which build up a three-dimensional picture of inside of the body
- **Laparoscopy** - A small operation which allows the doctor to look at the ovaries and the surrounding area. It is done under a general anaesthetic, and may mean a short stay in hospital.
- **Laparotomy** - Sometimes cancer of the ovary cannot be definitely diagnosed before a full operation (laparotomy) is performed

Types of Ovarian Cancer

There are several types of ovarian cancer.

They include:

- **Epithelial ovarian cancer**, which affects the surface layers of the ovary and is the most common type
- **Germ cell tumours**, which originate in the cells that make the eggs
- **Stromal tumours**, which develop within the cells that hold the ovaries together

Epithelial ovarian cancer is by far the most common type of ovarian cancer.

The exact cause of ovarian cancer is unknown, although a number of possible factors are thought to be involved, such as the number of eggs the ovaries release and whether someone in your family has had ovarian cancer in the past. However, only one in 10 cases of ovarian cancer has a genetic link.

Action Cancer also provides...

Early Detection

A breast screening service is available onboard the Big Bus and in Action Cancer House in Belfast. Health checks are also available onboard the Big Bus.

Support Services

Complementary therapy, Counselling and the Listening Ear Service are available for those closely affected by cancer in order to enhance quality of life.

Education

Information on our website and leaflets on cancer prevention and early detection. Our health promotion team delivers talks to schools, workplaces and groups across Northern Ireland.

Action Cancer is Northern Ireland's leading local cancer charity. All of the services we provide are confidential. We depend heavily on public and business donations to keep our services going.

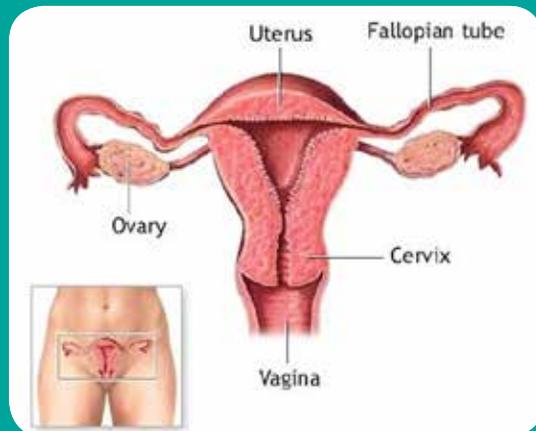
Cervical Cancer

The cervix

The cervix is another name for the neck of the womb and it is covered by cells both on the inside and the outside of the womb. These cells can become cancerous leading to cervical cancer.

What causes cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer is often caused by the human papilloma virus (HPV). There are different types of HPV however not all types will cause cervical cancer. HPV is sexually transmitted and it is therefore very important to practice safe sex.



There are approximately 100 females a year in Northern Ireland diagnosed with cervical cancer and approximately 23 lives are lost each year to the disease.

The HPV (human papilloma virus) Vaccine

There are over 100 types of HPV but only 13 of these are known to cause cervical cancer and just two – types 16 and 18 – cause over 70% of the cases. The HPV vaccine is being offered to protect against types 16 and 18, which are the two most common types causing cervical cancer. To be fully effective the vaccination needs to be given before the start of sexual activity.



Ways to lower your risk of getting Cervical Cancer

- Regular cervical screening every 3-5 years is the best way to detect changes to the cells of the cervix
- The human papilloma virus (HPV) vaccination protects against the two strains of virus responsible for most cases of cervical cancer. The vaccine is given to girls when they're 12 to 13 years old, with three doses given over a six-month period.
- Use a condom during sex as it can protect against HPV viruses linked with cervical cancer
- Give up smoking



Symptoms of Cervical Cancer

Cancer of the cervix can take many years to develop, before it does, changes occur in the cells of the cervix. If you notice any of the following symptoms please go immediately to your GP for further examination.



The most common symptom is abnormal bleeding outside of your period;

- Bleeding after sex
- Bleeding between periods
- Bleeding after the menopause (i.e. if your periods have stopped for 6 months or more)

Some women also have:

- A vaginal discharge that smells unpleasant
- Discomfort or pain in your lower pelvis

Precancerous cell changes **do not** usually have symptoms which is why it is so important to have a regular smear test.

Who will receive the vaccine?

It is recommended the vaccination is given routinely as early as possible in schools to Year 9 girls aged 12 to 13. Having the vaccine reduces the risk of cervical cancer by 70%. The vaccination is given as three injections within six months to get the best protection, or within 12 months if an injection is missed. Like the vaccinations given to babies, it is important that the course is completed (all three doses) for it to work properly. The side effects are mild – mostly stinging or soreness where the injection is given in the arm, which soon wears off.

Cervical screening will still be essential to detect changes in the cervix caused by the other types of HPV and women will continue to be invited for screening as normal.

See more at: www.helpprotectyourself.info

For more information please contact **028 9080 3344** or email info@actioncancer.org

The Smear Test

Women between the ages of 25 and 64 need to protect themselves from cervical cancer. You can do this by undergoing a simple cervical screening process called a smear test. The test shows if there are any cells in the cervix that are not normal.

All women who are registered with a GP are invited to attend for a smear test at least once every three or five years. The first invitation will be sent out just prior to a woman's 25th birthday and every three years thereafter until 49. Women from the age of 50-64, will be invited once every five years.

It is very important to attend for your smear when called.

What is a smear test?

A smear test is a method of detecting abnormal cells on the cervix. Detecting and removing abnormal cervical cells can prevent cervical cancer.

The cervical screening test usually takes around five minutes to carry out. An instrument called a speculum will be gently inserted into your vagina to hold the walls of your vagina open so that your cervix is visible. A small soft brush will be used to take some cells from the surface of your cervix.



The sample of cervical cells will then be sent to a laboratory and examined under a microscope to see whether there are any abnormal cells. It's very quick and most women feel only slight discomfort. The results of the test will be sent to you in the post and they aim to have the results back to you in 2 weeks.

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Risk factors for Cervical Cancer

HPV and Sex

The most important risk factor for cervical cancer is infection by the human papilloma virus (HPV). Having sex at an early age and having several sexual partners can increase the risk of catching HPV and developing cervical cancer.

Smoking

Women who smoke double their risk of getting cervical cancer.

A weakened immune system

Women who are immunosuppressed (for example, those who are taking immunosuppressive drugs after an organ transplant or women who are HIV positive) may be at increased risk of developing cervical cancer.

Contraceptive pill

Long-term use of the contraceptive pill (for more than 5 years) can slightly increase the risk of developing cervical cancer.

Family history

If your mother or sister has had cervical cancer you are at greater risk that if no one in your family has had it.