

Cervical cancer is preventable

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Women aged 30-65 are invited to take part in cervical cancer screenings. As of 2021, screening is free of charge for women without health insurance. Unfortunately, only 50% of the women invited end up coming for an examination every year. Approximately 150-170 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer in Estonia every year.

As of this year, a HPV test is performed as the first test of the screening and a liquid-based PAP test is prepared on the basis of the same analysis material, if needed. According to East Tallinn Central Hospital gynaecologist Dr Külli Erlang, these analyses help discover precancerous changes in cervical cells to apply timely treatment. "The sooner we discover precancerous or cancerous changes in the cervix the better the treatment results," adds Dr Erlang.

Early stages of cervical cancer display no symptoms that women can look out for. However, as the cancer grows, various symptoms may occur, such as vaginal bleeding, foul smelling discharge, heavy bleeding during periods and long-lasting periods, postcoital bleeding, pain in the later stages of cancer.

Unlike other cancers, we know what causes cervical cancer – high-risk virus types of the human papillomavirus (HPV). These viruses are spread from person to person through skin contact and sexually. "80% of people catch some type of HPV in their lifetime and usually recover within two years. HPV has also been linked to the development of certain other tumours, also present among men," says Dr Erlang.

It is possible to prevent catching a high-risk type of HPV by getting vaccinated. As a preventive measure against cervical cancer, 12-year-old girls receive the HPV vaccination free of charge as part of the national vaccination plan. This prevents permanent HPV infections and the precancerous conditions and tumours caused by HPV in 85-95% of cases. This vaccine has been used for over a decade elsewhere in the world and its effect is obvious – cervical changes caused by HPV have reduced significantly.

An appointment for cervical cancer screening can be booked in East Tallinn Central Hospital Women's Clinic by calling [6661900](tel:6661900) or via the digital registration system ipatsient.ee.

In 2021, women born in 1956, 1961, 1966, 1971, 1976, 1981, 1986 and 1991 will be invited for screening.

Participation in screening is free of charge for all women (incl. for persons without health insurance)