

CERVICAL CANCERS RISE IN YOUNG WOMEN

The incidence of cervical cancer in women in their 20s has risen by over 40 per cent between 1992 and 2006 in England, despite the overall incidence of cervical cancer dropping by 30 per cent, according to research* that will be presented at the National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) Cancer Conference in Liverpool which starts tomorrow.

The research – funded by Cancer Research UK – looked at overall trends in cervical cancer incidence in women aged between 20 and 79 years from 1982 to 2006.

The findings show that – after initially dropping following the introduction of cervical screening in England – the number of women aged between 20 and 29 diagnosed with cervical cancer is now rising in most areas of the country. Yet, for all other age groups, the number of women developing the disease has fallen over the same period.

Between 1992 and 1996 around five women aged 20-29 years in every 100,000 (963 cases, around 192 per year) were diagnosed with cervical cancer. This increased to around six per 100,000 between 2002 and 2006 (988 cases, around 197 per year).

Most women in the study would have been first invited for screening from the age of 20 and after 2003 women were invited from the age of 25**.

In comparison in women aged 50-79 years the incidence dropped from around 17 per 100,000 (6263 cases) between 1992 and 1996 to just over 10 per 100,000 (4089 cases) during 2002 and 2006.

And the latest figures for 2007 - 2008 show that the rising trend for 20 to 29 year olds is continuing with around nine women in every 100,000 (606 cases, 303 per year) now developing cervical cancer.

Cervical screening detects early changes in the cervix which can be treated before they progress into cancer.

Robert Alston, study author and Cancer Research UK Scientist from the University of Manchester, said: "Our results show that although numbers getting cervical cancer are dropping in the immediate years after cervical screening began, the numbers of women in their 20s now developing the disease have been rising since the early 90s."

Smoking is a known risk factor for cervical cancer as chemicals in cigarette smoke can damage cells in the cervix making them less able to fight off infections and protect against the disease developing.

Robert Alston, added: "Crucially our findings demonstrate the importance of the HPV vaccination programme and for as many women over 25 as possible to go for cervical screening."

Hazel Nunn, head of evidence and health information at Cancer Research UK, said: "These figures show just how crucial it is for all 12-13 year-old girls to have the HPV vaccination. Human papilloma virus (HPV) is a very common infection and the major cause of cervical cancer. The HPV vaccine protects against two strains of the infection and is most effective when given to women before they are exposed to the virus.

"The vaccine is available for no cost to all 12-13 year old girls and is usually given at school. Older women can pay to have the vaccine if they wish.

"Whatever your age, if you have any bleeding between periods, during sex or after the menopause, you should go to your GP."

ENDS

For media enquiries please contact Laura Dibb in the NCRI press office on 0203 469 8051/8300 or, out-of-hours, the duty press officer on 07050 264 059

Notes to Editors:

* To view the conference abstract click here <http://www.ncri.org.uk/ncriconference/2011abstracts/abstracts/A93.html>

Increasing rates of cervical cancer in young women in England: an analysis of national data 1982–2006. Foley, Alston, Birch et al. *British Journal of Cancer* (2011) 105, 177–184. doi:10.1038/bjc.2011.196
<http://www.nature.com/bjc/journal/v105/n1/full/bjc2011196a.html>

**In October 2003 the age that women are first invited to cervical screening was changed to 25 this is because the available evidence shows that cervical screening in women aged 20-24 is much less effective in preventing cancer. Cervical screening detects a precancerous condition so that women who test positive and are treated do not appear in incidence figures.

For more information about cervical cancer visit www.cancerhelp.org.uk



About the NCRI Cancer Conference

The National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) Cancer Conference is the UK's major forum for showcasing the best British and international cancer research. The Conference offers unique opportunities for networking and sharing knowledge by bringing together world leading experts from all cancer research disciplines. The seventh annual NCRI Cancer Conference is taking place from the 6-9 November 2011 at the BT Convention Centre in Liverpool. For more information visit www.ncri.org.uk/ncriconference

About the NCRI

The National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) was established in April 2001. It is a UK-wide partnership between the government, charity and industry which promotes co-operation in cancer research among the 22 member organisations for the benefit of patients, the public and the scientific community. For more information visit www.ncri.org.uk

NCRI members are: the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI); Association for International Cancer Research; Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council; Breakthrough Breast Cancer; Breast Cancer Campaign; Cancer Research UK; CHILDREN with CANCER UK, Department of Health; Economic and Social Research Council; Leukaemia & Lymphoma Research; Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research; Macmillan Cancer Support; Marie Curie Cancer Care; Medical Research Council; Northern Ireland Health and Social Care (Research & Development Office); Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation; Scottish Government Health Directorates (Chief Scientist Office); Tenovus; The Prostate Cancer Charity; Welsh Government (National Institute for Social Care and Health Research); The Wellcome Trust; and Yorkshire Cancer Research.

www.ncri.org.uk/ncriconference

NCRI Cancer Conference Press Office

Angel Building, 407 St John Street, London EC1V 4AD

t: +44 (0)20 3469 8252 | +44 (0)7050 264 059 (out of hours) | e: press@ncri.org.uk