

RESOURCE FROM:

Cervical cancer screening and treatment in low-resource settings:
PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE FROM PATH

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Leaflet on Visual Inspection with Acetic Acid

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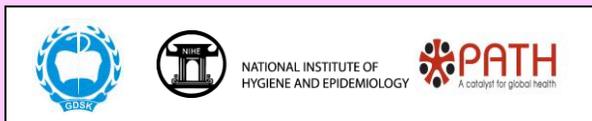
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www.rho.org/HPV-screening-treatment.htm

Cervical cancer is a preventable disease!



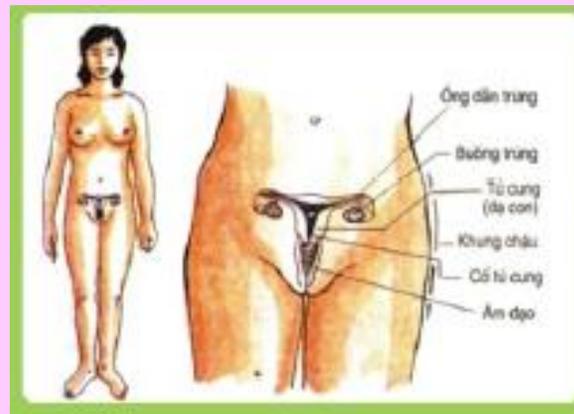
VIA- a new, fast and easy way to detect yourself symptoms of cervical cancer!

- Cervical cancer is a preventable disease.
- If detected early, it can be treated



General information about cervical cancer

- Cervical cancer is the cancer of the lower part of the uterus that connects to the vaginal canal. Cancer of the cervix happens when cervical cells become abnormal and grow out of control.
- Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer in women worldwide. Globally, cervical cancer affects approximately 490,000 women each year with more than 270,000 deaths.
- Cervical cancer is the leading cause of cancer deaths in women in developing countries. About 85% of women dying from cervical cancer reside in developing countries.
- In Vietnam, cervical cancer is estimated to be the second most common cancer in women, but it kills more women here than any other kind of cancer. In 2005, according to statistics of the National Cancer Institute, there were more than 7,000 new cases of cervical cancer and more than 4,000 deaths.
- Cervical cancer causes a heavy burden on women, their families, their communities and all of society.



Women between the ages of 30 to 49, go to health facility for cervical cancer screening

Causes cancer of the cervix

- Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is the primary cause of cervical cancer.
- HPV infection is highly infectious, and the majority women and men will acquire HPV infection at some time in their life. However, most of these infections clear up by themselves. Five to ten percent of women infected with cancer-causing HPV types develop infections that last for a long time and these women have an increased risk of developing cancer. Cervical cancer is most common in women over 40.
- HPV is almost always transmitted sexually, although penetration is not necessary. HPV is transmitted through skin-to-skin contact, not through body fluids. Therefore, condoms may be less effective against HPV than when used to prevent other STIs. Using condoms correctly can protect against just 70% of HPV infection.

Main signs of cervical cancer

- Most women who have HPV infection and precancerous lesions have no signs or symptoms.
- The main symptoms of cervical cancer are:
 - Smelly discharge from the vagina
 - Bleeding after sex
 - Bleeding between menstrual periods
 - Bleeding after menopause.
- This means that she may be in the later stages of cervical cancer, when it is difficult to cure.
- For this reason, it is important to be screened for cervical cancer even when you feel healthy and have no symptoms, before cancer develops.

Cervical cancer at the late stage is difficult to cure and having a high risk of death

Cervical cancer can be prevented by 2 effective ways:

- HPV vaccination for girls prior to sexual debut is the best way to prevent infection (aside from not having sex).
- Pre-cancer screening of women to get treatment early for precancerous lesions. Detection methods include visual inspection with acetic acid or cervical smear testing (Pap smear)

Visual inspection with acetic acid (VIA)

- VIA is a simple and effective method to screen for cervical cancer. It is similar to a routine pelvic examination. In this case, the health worker swabs the cervix with 3%-5% acetic acid (vinegar) using a cotton applicator. After a minute, abnormal or pre-cancerous areas have a distinctive white appearance. The procedure is not painful.
- VIA provides immediate results. It is not necessary to return to the clinic later to learn about your results as your doctor will tell you right away.
- VIA services are available at health facility at commune, district and province.

Screening with VIA and HPV vaccination are two main methods to protect women from HPV infection and cervical cancer

Treatment options for pre-cancerous conditions with Cryotherapy

- If the VIA test is positive (white areas were found) and the lesions are small, the clinician will recommend treatment with cryotherapy (freezing). The cryotherapy equipment uses compressed gas (carbon dioxide) that freezes and destroys the abnormal cells and cures the condition.
- Cryotherapy is an outpatient procedure that can be performed easily and quickly (in 15 minutes or less) without anesthesia. Cryotherapy is safe and not painful.
- If the precancerous lesions are not appropriate for treatment with cryotherapy, women will be referred a hospital for other appropriate treatment.



Women begin their sexual life, they initiate their risk of getting the virus that causes cervical cancer

Women should have cervical cancer screening done every 5 years to monitor that the cervix is healthy and to avoid cervical cancer

SOME COMMON CONCERNS

❖ **I feel fine, do I still need to go for a cervical screening?**

Yes, you should go. A woman can feel fine even if her cervix is unhealthy and starting to change. These changes do not cause any signs of illness. We can only tell whether the cervix has signs of precancer by looking at it using VIA or Pap testing.

❖ **Why is it important to go for the check up between 30 to 49 years of age?**

It is usually between the ages of 30 to 49 when the cervix can start to change, but cancer has not started yet so we can treat the problem easily. Without screening, we do not know who has this problem. So we ask that all women aged 30 to 49 years seek screening as soon as possible.

❖ **I am pregnant, can I still go for the screening?**

No, not yet. The test will not harm the baby but it could give false results during pregnancy. Wait until after the baby is born and then go for VIA.

Health facilities where can get a VIA check up:

- *Commune health stations in Hoang Thanh, Hoang Thanh, Hoang Duc, Hoang Son, Hoang Phu communes.*
- *General hospital in Hoang Hoa district*
- *Preventive medicine centre in Hoang Hoa district*
- *Thanh Hoa Obstetric & Gynecology Hospital*
- *Thanh Hoa Maternal & Child Health Centre*