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communication@ruh.nhs.uk
www.ruh.nhs.uk

RUH prompts women to have regular cervical screening test

Women in the region are being urged to take control of their own health by making sure a date for a cervical screening test is firmly in the diary.

Russell Luker, Consultant for Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the Royal United Hospital, says: "Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable of all cancers, and having a regular cervical screening test can reduce your risk of developing it by 90 per cent."

Cervical screening is not a test for diagnosing cervical cancer. It is a test to check the health of the cervix, which is the lower part of the womb. For many women the test results show that everything is fine, but for one in 20 women, the test shows changes in cells that can be caused by many things. Most of these changes will not lead to cervical cancer.

"January is Cervical Cancer Awareness Month, and this is a timely prompt for women to have a think about when they last had a cervical screening test."

"Investing a small amount of time in having a regular cervical screen could save your life. Conditions that could develop into cancer can be spotted early on so it can be stopped before it even gets started."

Importantly cervical cancer may form without any warning signs at all. The condition which precedes the onset of cancer may be present for up to 10 years, which is why a simple smear test is so effective to avoid this devastating disease.

Around 900 women die of cervical cancer in England each year. However, many of those who develop it have not been screened regularly. Not going for cervical screening is one of the biggest risk factors for developing cervical cancer.

Regular cervical screening tests every three years are recommended between the ages of 25 and 49, and every five years between the ages of 50 and 64.

Everyone is entered onto a central screening computer which will call you for your smear test when the time is due. The invitation is via the post, which means that if you aren't registered with a GP, or if you have moved without updating your details with your GP, you may get missed. If you think that you have missed a smear then contact your local practice, most will be able to easily check your details on their records and make an appointment if you need one.

Russell says: "There are lots of things in life that you can't control, but by having a regular cervical screening test, you can greatly reduce your likelihood of developing cervical cancer."

Ends

Notes for Editors

Cancer Research UK scientists estimate cervical screening saves up to 4,500 lives each year in England.

Cervical cancer is not thought to be hereditary. Cervical cancer, in 99.7% of cases, is caused by persistent infection with a virus called human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is a very common virus transmitted through skin to skin contact in the genital area. Up to 80% of people of reproductive age will be infected with HPV at some point in their lives. However, for the majority of women this will not result in cervical cancer. Cervical cancer is rare while HPV infection is common.

Smoking can also increase the risk of Cervical cancer.

More information and support can be obtained from your local health clinic, or visit www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk or call NHS Direct on 0845 46 47 or visit www.nhs.uk