

Advancing HPV Prevention in Singapore: From Awareness to Action

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In Singapore, cervical cancer is the tenth most common cancer among females.¹ Cervical cancers are caused by persistent infections with one of 13 carcinogenic human papillomavirus (HPV) genotypes: 16, 18, 31, 33, 35, 39, 45, 51, 52, 56, 58, 59, and 68.² It is a highly preventable cancer and can be prevented by screening for and treating the precancerous stages of cervical cancer. In Singapore, it is recommended that females 25 to 29 years old should undergo a Pap smear at a 3-yearly interval; for females 30 years and above, they should undergo the HPV test at a 5-yearly interval. HPV vaccinations can also protect against infection with HPV and have been shown to prevent more than 90 percent of cervical precancers and cancers when given before first exposure to the virus.³ In Singapore, HPV vaccination is recommended for all females 9 to 26 years old under the National Childhood Immunisation Schedule and National Adult Immunisation Schedule.

The 2019 National Population Health Survey revealed that 88.5 percent of Singaporean females aged 25 to 74 years old were aware of the cervical cancer screening tests available, and around one in two women from the same age range had been screened for cervical cancer within the last three years.⁴ With increased awareness, screening and early treatment, the age-standardised mortality rate for cervical cancer has fallen significantly from 4.9 to 1.7 per 100,000 population from 1968-1972 to 2017-2021.¹

However, more efforts can be made to increase awareness of HPV and cervical cancer prevention as only 76.5 percent of the younger age group (25-29 years) had knowledge of Pap smear compared to 91.0 percent of the older age group (30-69 years).⁴ Such efforts have been undertaken within the community to increase awareness even at the primary school level. The Health Promotion Board has worked with schools to increase awareness of women's health, and the topic of cancers is part of the Health and Physical Education curriculum for upper primary and lower secondary school students.

This issue of the *Singapore Family Physician* highlights the importance of advancing HPV prevention in Singapore.

In Unit 1, Dr Ida Ismail-Pratt and Lee Jieying give a comprehensive review on the recommendations to prevent cervical cancer in Singapore.

In Unit 2, Dr See Hui Ti provides a timely update on the role that family physicians can play in advancing HPV vaccination, and cervical cancer screening and treatment among their patients.

In Unit 3, Drs Tan Kok Kuan and Matthew Tan shed light on HPV infections amongst men and what can be done to prevent this.

In this issue, A/Prof Goh Lee Gan has selected ten current readings on topics related to HPV infection.

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3. Lei J, Ploner A, Elfström KM, et al. HPV Vaccination and the Risk of Invasive Cervical Cancer. *N Engl J Med*. 2020 Oct 1;383(14):1340-1348. doi: 10.1056/NEJMoa1917338. PMID: 32997908.
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