

Every year hundreds of women in South Africa die from cancer of the cervix. SPEAK looks at what causes it and how it can be prevented.

CERVICAL CANCER

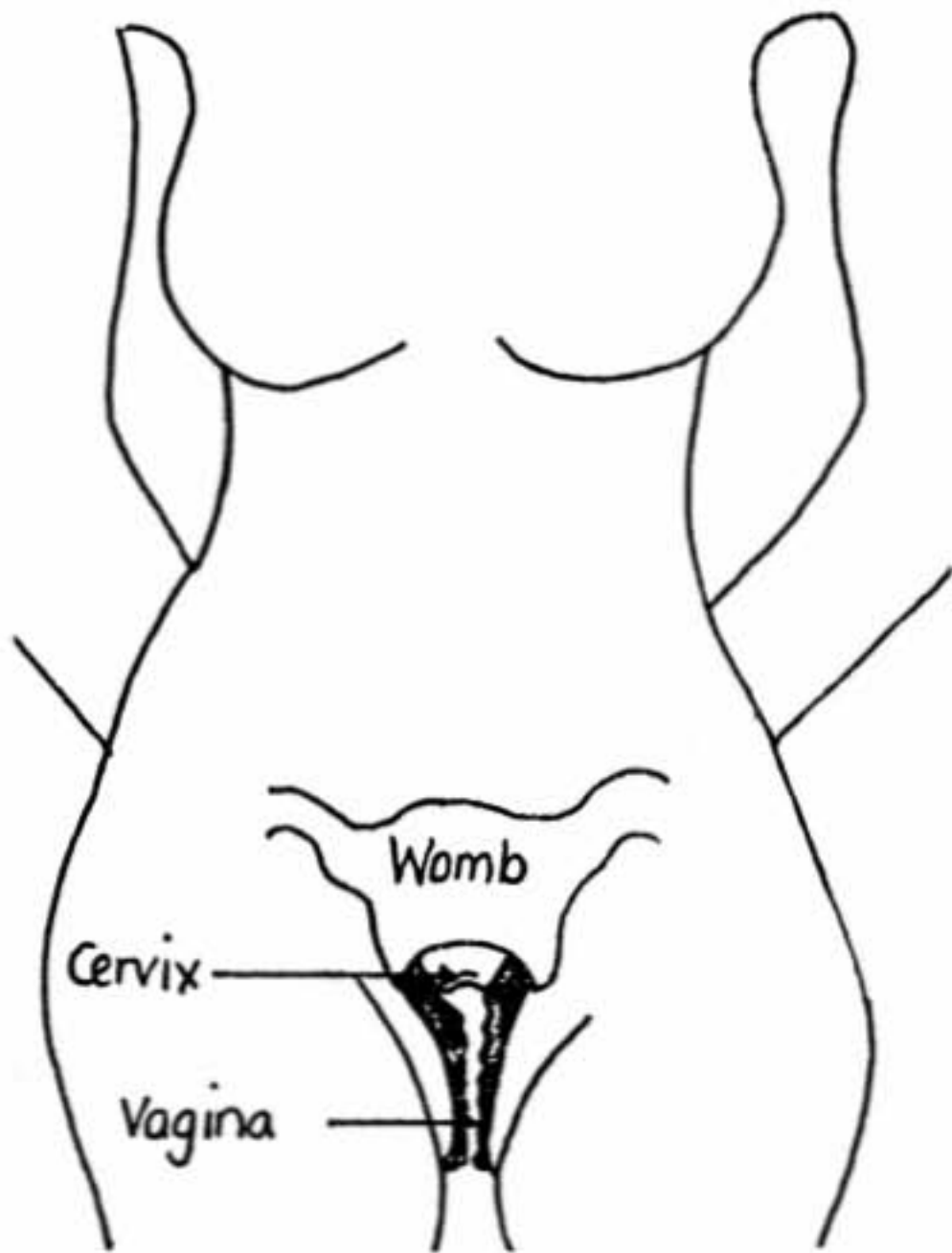
What is Cancer of the Cervix?

The cervix is the opening at the lower end of the womb (uterus). It is at the top of the vagina. Many women get cancer of the cervix, a disease that may prevent a woman from having children, and can cause death. Cancer is a disease which destroys the healthy cells in the body. When cancer of the cervix starts, the healthy cells slowly change into cancer cells. The cancer cells begin to destroy the cervix, eventually spreading to the rest of the body. Once the cancer starts spreading it is difficult to treat. If it is discovered at the early stages it can be cured.

What are the signs of Cervical Cancer?

The signs only show once the uterus has already become infected with cancer. Some of the signs are:

- bleeding and pain after sex
- bleeding between periods
- pain and backache
- a discharge which smells bad
- bleeding past child-bearing age



How do women get Cervical Cancer?

The cause of cancer of the cervix is not known. However, sexual intercourse does spread the germ that causes cancer of the cervix, as the germ comes out with the man's sperm. The chances of getting cervical cancer are

increased in the following situations:

- having sex from a young age
- having many sexual partners
- many pregnancies
- genital warts or herpes
- smoking
- stress

How can Cervical Cancer be prevented?

You can have a PAP smear. A PAP smear is a test that helps to see if there are any changes in the cells of the cervix. These cell changes are not cancer, but if left untreated they can develop into cancer.

In a PAP smear the cells are scraped off the cervix. These cells are sent to a laboratory where they are tested. If abnormal cells are found, it can be treated easily. If you have cancer of the cervix it can be completely cured if found in the early stages. If the cancer has spread to the inside of your body, you will need to have a hysterectomy (removal of your womb). The removal of the womb does not effect a woman's sexuality. It will mean that it will not be possible to become pregnant. It is important to have PAP smears to prevent cancer from developing.

Where do you get PAP smears?

Although PAP smears are very cheap to do and would save the lives of many women in South Africa, there is no National Health Policy on PAP smears. In fact PAP smears are usually only done in hospitals and clinics when the doctors and nurses think that a woman has cancer. Often this is too late.

Until there is proper legislation regarding PAP smears, women must insist on having a PAP smear when they go to the clinic or public hospital. It is advisable for women to have PAP smears once a year. If this is not possible then once every two years.

**In the interests
of women's
health we must
organise around
PAP smears to
save our lives.**

For more information you can contact the Cancer Association of South Africa at their national office (011) 4032825 or one of their branches:

Durban (031) 259525

Pretoria (012) 3293036

Cape Town (021) 6895347

Port Elizabeth (041) 351212

Bloemfontein (051) 477535

Tvl (011) 6465628 ☉

What to expect when going for a PAP smear

PAP smears are not painful. However, they may be slightly uncomfortable. You will be asked to lie down on your back. The doctor will then ask you to bend your knees and let your legs drop open. A metal object called a speculum will be put into your vagina. It is closed when it is put into the vagina.

When it is inside the vagina it is opened so that the cervix can be seen through the speculum. A light is shone into the vagina in order to see the cervix.

A small wooden stick is used to scrape off cells from the cervix. The cells are then placed onto a piece of glass to be sent off to the laboratory for testing. The speculum is then removed from the vagina. When you receive the results from the PAP smear you will be told whether you need to see the doctor again.

It is important to have a PAP smear. Remember that cervical cancer is curable if detected in its early stages. If you leave it too late you may need to have an operation.

HEALTH BRIEFS

Coffee affects your eating habits

If you eat all the time and drink a lot of coffee, the caffeine in the coffee is probably contributing to your desire to eat a lot. A study of 171 people with eating disorders found that those who drink eight or more cups of coffee everyday, felt the need to eat a lot more than those who did not drink that much coffee.

AIDS – Botswana in trouble

The spread of AIDS in Botswana is among the fastest in the world.

Botswana's National AIDS Control Programme say last year more than 60 000 people, out a population of 1.3 million, had been infected.

Treatment for the mentally ill

Thousands of mentally ill people around the world are not getting the treatment and help they need.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO),

about half a billion people are mentally ill. Most of them live in developing countries where health services are not coping with most health problems.

High rate of cancer in Natal

In Natal, cancer claims the lives of more children than in other parts of South Africa. Natal has the highest rate of kidney cancer, cervical cancer and skin cancer. It also has the highest rate of gullet (the food passage from the mouth to the stomach) cancer.

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As a matter of fact...

Cosatu demands child-care

The Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) is planning to put pressure on companies and the government to supply money for child-care facilities in the community and at workplaces. Cosatu is also demanding 20 days paid child-care leave a year, so that working parents can attend to the concerns of their children in emergency situations.



Graphic reproduced from: Sexual and Domestic Violence, Zimbabwe

Dangerous skin creams still on sale

Today, ten years after Zimbabwe banned skin lighteners, some of the creams are still being sold in shops and open markets in Harare. Many of these creams contain more than the accepted amounts of hydroquinone, which can damage your skin. The products are made in neighbouring countries and taken into Zimbabwe.

Rape in marriage: will it be recognised?

The Prevention of Family Violence Bill, was recently put to Parliament. The Bill argues for the law to see rape in marriage as a criminal offence. The law will make it possible for a husband to be convicted if he rapes his wife. The Bill will give a judge or magistrate the power to grant a restraining order against a husband/wife on application by his or her partner, ordering him/her not to do certain things.

Women kill abusers – self defence?

Canada's Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies has called on their government to include battered women who kill their abusers in its legal definition of self defence. The association which provides services to women Canadian prisons says "these women acted out of desperation and killed their partners. A review of the law is the only way to examine how abuse has been looked at by the criminal justice system."

Cuba struggles to celebrate heroes day

This year Cuba will not be holding big celebrations to mark one of the most important days in its history. This is because of the country's serious economic problems. July 26 is the anniversary of the 1953 guerilla attack which started the revolution that led to the fall of the right-wing government and the establishment of the Peoples' Republic of Cuba in 1959.

Information from local and international publications

TAXI TALK

So you thought black lesbians did not exist? Well you were wrong.

Neither are they products of a "poisonous Western culture". We are women who love women, women who respect women, women who believe we have a right to choose who to love - instead of whom to hate. We come in all sizes and shapes. Hard for some of you to believe, huh?

We have been and still are called names, just like most women are: witches and homebreakers who can't find a man. That we only need to be f....d by a man in order to come to our senses.

People think we are women who are not comfortable with who we are, so we try to be men. They think we only wear trousers (we wear whatever we choose to) so we can strap on fake penises. We are women, we do not want to be men. We love as women and live as women. We are so comfortable with being women, we love being women so much that loving women is the next logical step. Women cannot deny they feel close to other women

Ntombi, a young black lesbian activist speaks out on women's right to choose who to love.



and find it easier sharing their deepest feelings and secrets with women. You love your sister, your girlfriend don't you? So what's wrong with us lesbians loving other women? Is it because we make love and have sex with women? Well, that is simply part of expressing our love and passion for women, just as much as heterosexual women do.

We are women who live in constant fear

of being found out. We fear being isolated or even beaten up. Those of us who are open about our sexuality have to deal with a lot of discrimination from our families, friends, society and the law. Nevertheless, some of us do defy people's attitude towards us. We come out, hold hands, kiss and love in public, in the privacy of gay and lesbian clubs and our homes. To all lesbians out there, especially black lesbians, I say don't let them silence you. You have a right to exist and to love women. ★

NOTICES

A call to all South African Women

"The erotic is everything that gives us passion and feeling. It is in making love, in giving birth, in the sunlight on a bare forearm. It is creativity, it is the celebration of life. It is the force that gives us hope, even in the worst circumstances. It is powerful, alive and it is in all of us."

This is the view of a group of women who are putting together a collection of erotic writing by South African women.

They are looking for erotic poems, stories, sketches by women about your wildest dreams: a brief, special moment; your forbidden thoughts and desires; the images, smells, memories, colours, that turn you on, delight you, make you feel sensually and fully alive...

Write about it and send it before October 30 1993 to:

**Eros does Erotica
P O Box 132
Kalk Bay
7990**

If you'd like your work returned, please send a self-addressed envelope and include a stamp.

Museums - a different way to learn

Museums are an interesting way to learn more about your school. There are museums of history, zoology, geography and even economics. Your nearest public library will be able to give you a list of the museums in your area.

Many universities have museums that are open to the public. Wits University for example, has museums of medicine, archaeology and zoology.

If you want more information or a tour of these, contact: The Schools Liaison Office at (011) 716 3597

Voter Education

Project Vote of the Centre for Development Studies (CDS) and the National Democratic Institute of International Affairs have brought our two handbooks: Manual for Community Educators and Manual for Trainers. CDS has been training organisations and individuals on how to educate their communities about voting. **For more information write to:**
**Centre for Development Studies
University of the Western Cape
Private Bag X17
Bellville
7535
or call: (021) 959 2151**

Youth Drama

Tswelopele Library in Maokeng, Kroonstad, is touring in schools with the production of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, performed by unemployed youths. The aim of staging the production for schools is to make it easier for matric pupils to understand the play.

**For further details contact:
Thomas Mokoena at (0562)
41141 extension 256**