

Your behaviour/situation is a major risk factor

Prevention is better than cure and a stitch in time saves nine. We need to have more knowledge on preventable diseases so that we can minimize our chances of catching them and increase chances of successful treatment. Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are to the most part preventable. This also applies to cervical cancer which researchers say is caused by a sexually transmitted virus called HPV (Human papillomavirus).

According to Dr. Karanja who talked to a group of women worshippers at Gateway PCEA church, cancer of the cervix is more prevalent in developing countries. In Kenya it is six times more common than cancer of the breast and affects the poor more. He impressed on the ladies the need for screening and changing behavioral attitudes. He also asked them to take note on immunization availability to the younger women

. According to Dr. Karanja Christians avoid talking about fornication and adultery while parents teach their children by example by being unfaithful to their spouses.

Screening

Early detection of the cancer is key to cure and survival. A pap smear which is fairly inexpensive can show the stage of the disease by identifying potentially precancerous changes. It is recommended that cervical cancer screening should begin approximately three years after the onset of vaginal intercourse and/or no later than twenty-one years of age.

Symptoms

Cervical cancer usually presents with no symptoms at the earlier stages. Symptoms in later stages include vaginal discharge, pain during sexual intercourse, and spotting. In later stages the cancer may be present in the abdomen, lungs etc. Symptoms of advanced cancer may include loss of appetite, weight loss, fatigue, pelvic pain, back pain, leg pain, single swollen leg,

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heavy bleeding and characteristic smelly discharge from the vagina, leaking of urine or faeces from the vagina, and bone fractures.

Treatment

If it is caught early, cervical cancer is easy to treat but gets more difficult in later stages. Treatment consists of surgery in the early stages of the disease and includes chemotherapy and radiotherapy in advanced stages of the disease

Risky behaviour and conditions

1. Having sex before the age of 18 years and also giving birth before the age of 18 years
This is because the cervix is immature making it more vulnerable to infection. This calls for sex education for both girls and boys so that they can realize the dangers of underage and pre marital sex. It also calls for strong fathers and mothers of faith who can teach by example.
2. Having many sexual partners or being married to someone who has many sexual partners. Some men are carriers of the virus making women they marry or others they have sex with prone to cervical cancer. Fidelity of the husband is therefore not a joking matter, nor is getting married to the “village bull”.
3. Having sexually transmitted diseases including Chlamydia, genital warts, herpes and many other viral sexually transmitted diseases including HIV
4. Use of hormonal contraception.

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5. Cigarette smoking (including passive smoking).
6. Family history
7. Dietary factors
8. Multiple pregnancies

Prevention

Sex within a caring, and responsible relationship is the best alternative for preventing cervical cancer and .There is also a vaccine for HPV which is targeted at girls and women of age 9 to 26. The vaccine only works if given before infection occurs and is therefore ideally given to girls before they begin having sex. Even though the vaccine is available in Kenya, it is relatively expensive. Condoms also reduce but do not eliminate the risk of contracting cervical cancer. Circumcision of men involved in high risk sexual behaviour has also been cited as offering some protection.

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