

# Women urged to accept NHS cervical screening invitations

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Women have been urged by NHS officials to attend cervical screenings after figures showed a third of those under 50 do not take up their invitation.

Each year, about 3,200 women in the UK are diagnosed with cervical cancer and 850 die from it. It is the 14th most common cancer affecting women in Britain, with women aged 30 to 34 most likely to be diagnosed with it.

The disease develops when abnormal cells appear in the lining of the cervix and grow, eventually coming together as a tumour. If the cells are not caught early the cancer can spread to other parts of the body.

Of the 11 million eligible women aged 25 to 49, 65.8% took up their invitation and were screened on time as of December of last year, lower than the 74.1% among those aged 50 to 64.

Last year, the head of NHS England, Amanda Pritchard, pledged to wipe out cervical cancer by 2040.

She said that the combination of HPV vaccination and screening for the disease meant that elimination of it was a realistic ambition.

HPV refers to a group of viruses that can be transmitted through sexual contact and cause no symptoms.

About 13 high-risk types of HPV are known to cause 99.7% of cervical cancers.

The HPV jab is given to boys and girls when they are 12 to 13 years old and is also offered to people at high risk from HPV.

Since last September, children have been receiving a single dose of the jab when they are in year 8 rather than the two doses given previously.

The NHS is urging all women to attend cervical screening even if they are vaccinated, as the jab does not protect against all types of HPV, so there is still a small chance of getting cervical cancer.

Steve Russell, chief delivery officer and national director for vaccinations and screening for NHS England, said: "We have set an ambitious target of eliminating cervical cancer within the next two decades – one of the few countries in the world who have committed to this – and we are doing everything we can to achieve our ambition by making it as easy as possible to make appointments, and continuing to send invites and reminders to all eligible women.

"But in order to make this a reality we need to see more women coming forward for their cervical screening appointments when invited – even if you previously missed your appointment, don't wait around for another invitation before contacting your GP practice – you can still book in now and this could save your life."

Women are invited for screening by the NHS every three to five years depending on their age, or more frequently if HPV is detected.

Source: The Guardian