Cervical cancer screening and management of cervical pre-cancers

Flip chart
Flip chart for community sensitization on cervical cancer

Purpose of the flip chart
This flip chart is meant to be used as an educational tool by community health workers for providing general information on cervical cancer, screening tests and treatment methods of cervical pre-cancers. This is to be used as a job-aid during health education and counseling sessions with women and community members.

Audience for this flip chart
This flip chart can be used to talk to small groups of 8–10 people or for one-to-one conversation. Depending on the category of audience the entire flip chart may be used in one go or a certain specific section may be used appropriately for a particular situation.

Topics of the flip chart
- Where is the cervix located in a woman's body?
- How does the cervix look like when seen with naked eye?
- What is cervical cancer?
- Who are at risk of getting cervical cancer?
- What are the symptoms of cervical cancer?
- What is the most important cause of cervical cancer?
How does human papillomavirus (HPV) cause cervical cancer?

How to prevent cervical cancer?

What are the cervical cancer screening tests?

What are the treatment methods of cervical pre-cancer?

Tips for using this flip chart

Prepare yourself on the contents of each page well in advance so that the audience benefits from your presentation.

Sit comfortably with your audience so that they can see the pictures on the flip chart clearly.

Start the conversation in your own language. Keep it simple and use small and easy to understand sentences.

Go through each page slowly explaining the visuals and the contents.

Encourage participation to make sure your audience is understanding.

Try to keep your presentation short and time bound.
Where is the cervix located in a woman’s body?

- Fallopian tube
- Uterus
- Ovary
- Cervix
- Vagina
Where is the cervix located in a woman’s body?

Talking points

- A woman’s uterus (womb) is located in the lower abdomen of her body. The uterus is pear shaped and is hollow. This is where the baby of a pregnant mother grows.

- The uterus has two parts –
  - Upper part is known as the body
  - Lower part is known as the cervix

- As the cervix is located inside a woman’s body, we cannot see it from the outside.
How does the cervix look when seen with the naked eye?
How does the cervix look when seen with the naked eye?

Talking points

- To look at the cervix with the naked eye, a small ‘spoon like’ instrument known as ‘speculum’ is used.
- When the speculum is placed in the ‘birth canal’ (vagina) and its blades are opened a little, a pinkish red rounded knob-like structure is visible. This is the cervix or the ‘mouth of the womb’.
- The cervix has an outer opening at the centre. This opening is connected to the cavity of the uterus through a canal. Menstrual blood from within the uterus and the baby during childbirth come out through this opening.
- Cervical cancer starts in the area of the cervix that is close to this opening.
What is cervical cancer?

Normal cell division

Cancer cell division

Uterus
Cervix
Vagina

Normal cervix

Uterus
Cervix
Vagina

Cervical cancer
What is cervical cancer?

Talking points

- Every organ of the human body is made up of thousands of cells.
- These cells divide very systematically, e.g. one cell divides into 2, then 2 cells divide into 4, and so on.
- Every cell has a life span of its own, after which it dies a natural death and is replaced by a new cell.
- This process of death of old cells and replacement by new cells continues throughout the life span, maintaining a steady balance that keeps the body functioning normally.
- Sometimes, this balance is lost and cells start growing and dividing in an uncontrolled manner.
- These are the abnormal cells that have the capacity to grow into large masses forming lumps or growths. These masses of abnormal cells are known as cancer.
- A normal cervix looks pinkish in color and has a smooth appearance.
- When the cells of the cervix divide abnormally and without control to form a growth, it is known as cervical cancer.
- The growth can spread into surrounding normal body parts and can damage them badly.
- If cervical cancer is not treated in time, it leads to a painful death.
Women who are at risk of getting cervical cancer

Women having children at a very young age

Women with many children

Women with HIV infection

Women who smoke

Women having multiple sex partners
Women who are at risk of getting cervical cancer

Talking points

All women who have or previously had sexual relations are at risk of developing cervical cancer. However, women who are at the highest risk are those who –

- are above the age of 40 years and have ever had sexual relations.
- start sexual intercourse at a very young age.
- have sexual relations with multiple partners.
- have too many children, especially at a young age.
- smoke tobacco.
- have HIV infection.
What are the symptoms of cervical cancer?

- Vaginal bleeding after sexual intercourse
- Vaginal bleeding between menstrual cycles
- Post menopausal bleeding
- Low back pain
What are the symptoms of cervical cancer?

Talking points

- In the beginning, when the cancer cells start to grow in the cervix of a woman, she does not feel any discomfort or problem. These cells grow very slowly.

- A woman starts to have problems only when the cancer grows and spreads to the surrounding area and other organs.

- There are several problems that a woman may start to experience. They are –
  - discharge from her vagina that smells bad.
  - discharge from her vagina that may be blood stained and is not responding to treatment.
  - bleeding from vagina after having sexual contact.
  - bleeding from vagina in between her menstrual cycles.
  - bleeding from vagina after stoppage of her menstrual cycles (menopause).

- If you or any of your friends, relatives, or neighbors have these problems, consult a doctor immediately. These problems may be due to cervical cancer.
What is the most important cause of cervical cancer?

Human Papillomavirus

Spreads through sexual contact
What is the most important cause of cervical cancer?

Talking points

- The most important cause of cervical cancer is infection with a virus named the human papillomavirus or the HPV.
- HPV infection is very common and both men and women can get this infection.
- Since this infection does not cause any discomfort, people having this infection will not know about it.
- This virus is transmitted from man to woman or woman to man during sexual contact.
- Condoms do not offer complete protection from HPV infection.
- This is the reason why women who have ever had sexual relations in their lifetime can get this infection and are at risk of developing cervical cancer.
How does HPV cause cervical cancer?

- Normal cervix
- HPV infection
- Cervical pre-cancer
- Cervical cancer

Infection by HPV leads to a 10-15 year progression to cervical cancer.
How does HPV cause cervical cancer?

Talking points

- Most HPV infections are temporary and clears on their own. There are no symptoms due to the infection and no treatment is required.

- However, in some women HPV infection persists in the cells of the cervix for many years (5–10 years) and causes the cells of the cervix to divide and grow abnormally.

- This abnormal division of the cells causes a change in the cervix. This change is known as cervical pre-cancer. There are simple tests (known as screening tests) to detect these early changes in the cervix.

- If cervical pre-cancers are not detected and treated early, they can turn into cervical cancer later in life.

- HPV infection can cause a healthy cervix to change into cervical cancer in 10–15 years time.
How to prevent cervical cancer

HPV vaccination

Cervical cancer screening
How to prevent cervical cancer

Talking points

- The best way to prevent cervical cancer is to avoid infection from HPV. This is done by vaccinating young girls before they start to have sexual contacts.

- All girls should be vaccinated against HPV between the age of 9–13 years. Vaccinated girls have very little risk of getting cervical cancer.

- Another effective method is to have special tests (screening tests) done that can detect cervical pre-cancers.

- All women aged 30 years and above should undergo cervical cancer screening tests at least once in 3–5 years.

- Other ways of reducing the risk of getting cervical cancer are –
  - Avoiding sexual relations at a very young age
  - Avoiding multiple sex partners
  - Having fewer number of children
  - Not smoking tobacco
What are the cervical cancer screening tests?

- VIA test
- HPV test
- PAP test
What are the cervical cancer screening tests?

Talking points

- There are several screening tests available for prevention of cervical cancer. It takes only a few minutes to do these tests and they do not cause any pain.

- The commonly done tests are –
  - Visual inspection with acetic acid (VIA)
  - HPV test
  - PAP smear

- VIA – In this test, a dilute solution of acetic acid (vinegar) is applied on the surface of cervix. The test results can be seen in 1 minute after applying the solution. If there is any abnormal area, it appears white in colour and can be easily identified.

- HPV test – Cells from the cervix are collected with the help of a special brush. The collected cells are put inside a small vial containing a solution and sent to a laboratory for examination. The results are available in about a week's time.

- PAP smear – This is a simple test where a small scraper or brush is used to collect cells from the cervix. The collected cells are smeared on a slide or into a solution and sent to a laboratory for examination. The results are obtained in about a week's time.
What are the treatment methods of cervical pre-cancer?

Treatment by cryotherapy
What are the treatment methods of cervical pre-cancer?

Talking points

- If a woman is detected as having cervical pre-cancer, she should be treated by a suitable method as early as possible.
- If she is not treated, some of these pre-cancers may progress to develop cervical cancer later.
- Cervical pre-cancers can be treated by either destroying the abnormal area on the cervix or by removing it.
- The treatment methods are simple. Most women can be treated at the primary health facilities and sent home within a few hours. Only some women may require referral to higher centres.
- Treatments that can be done at the primary care level are –
  - Cryotherapy, a method in which the abnormal area of the cervix is frozen for a few minutes by applying special cold probes. No anaesthesia or medication is required.
  - Cold coagulation, a treatment method in which a heated probe is applied on the cervix for a few seconds to destroy the abnormal area. No anaesthesia or medication is required.
- Treatments that are done at higher or referral centres are –
  - LEEP, a method in which the doctor removes the abnormal part of the cervix with the help of a small wire loop. Local anesthesia is required to do LEEP.
  - cone biopsy, a procedure where a small cone of the cervix, including the abnormal area is removed with the help of a knife (scalpel). Anesthesia is required to do a cone biopsy.