

Cervical cancer is now the second most common cancer among women worldwide. As a result of advances in molecular biology, the association between Human papilloma virus (HPV) infection and cervical cancer has been firmly established, and the introduction of a new vaccine against HPV infection may significantly decrease the incidence and mortality from cervical cancer in the years to come. This article will review the etiology and prevention of cervical cancer.

Introduction

Cervical carcinoma, despite dramatic improvements in early diagnosis and treatment, continues to be one of the major causes of cancer related deaths in women. Worldwide, it is the second leading cause of cancer death in women, each year an estimated 500 000 cases are newly diagnosed. More than 80 % of these occur in developing countries. Latin America and the Caribbean, along with Sub-Saharan Africa and SouthEast Asia exhibit some of the highest incidence rates worldwide.[1]

Among populations, there are large differences in incidence rates, this reflecting the influence of environmental factors, screening papanicolau tests, and treatment of pre-invasive lesions. [1]

In industrialized countries, mortality from cervical cancer has shown a dramatic decrease over the past decades, mainly due to periodic cytologic screening by Papanicolau (Pap) smear, which was introduced in the 1950's. However, programs for the prevention of cervical cancer have been unsuccessful in the developing world, even in countries where cytology has been available for many years and where organized health care systems exist. [3]

According to the institute of health information and statistics of the Czech Republic, the incidence of cervical carcinoma in the Czech Republic, has remained at a steady state of 21/100 000 from 1990 up till today, despite screening programs. In other European countries, for example Norway, there has been a significant decline in the incidence of cervical carcinoma over the past decade. According to the Cancer registry of Norway the incidence has decreased from 21/100 000 cases in the mid 1970ies till 10/100 000 in the year 2001.