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Cervical cancer screening and treatment in low-resource settings:
PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE FROM PATH

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Flipchart for Secondary Prevention of Cervical Cancer

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Flipchart for Secondary Prevention of Cervical Cancer

Introduction

Purpose of this flip chart:

This flip chart is for counseling women 30-49 years of age prior to being screened with visual inspection with acetic acid (VIA) and treated with cryo-therapy.

Counseling tips:

- Allow enough time for the session
- Introduce yourself
- Use a friendly tone of voice
- Be respectful of patient's ideas and concerns
- Use simple language and commonly understood terms
- Answer questions truthfully

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Adapted from:

Counseling Flip Chart for Health Centre Counseling Session

- PATH
- Ministry of Health, Kenya
- Kenya Cancer Association (KECANSA)
- Maendelo ya Wanawake Organisation (MYWO)

Cervical Cancer Precancerous Screening using Visual Inspection with Acetic Acid (VIA) and Cryotherapy developed by:

- National Health Security Office, Thailand
- Ministry of Health, Thailand
- Jhpiego, Baltimore, USA

Cervix and Cervical Cancer

Cervix

- The illustrations show the fallopian tubes, the uterine cavity (womb), ovaries, vagina and cervix
- The cervix is located in the lowest part of uterus.
- The cervix is an internal organ that the health provider can observe through the insertion of speculum in a vagina.



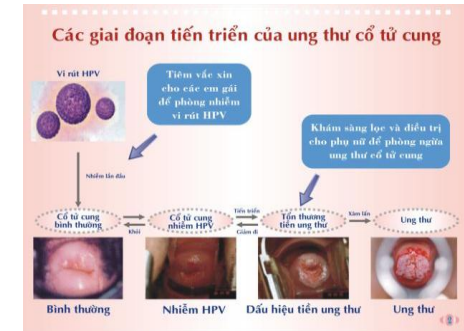
Cervical cancer

- Cancer is a disease in which cells in the body grow out of control.
- When cancer starts in the cervix, it is called cervical cancer.
- The main cause of cervical cancer is an HPV infection
- It is one of the most common causes of death for Vietnamese women.
- All women are at risk for cervical cancer.
- Cervical cancer is the easiest female cancer to prevent, with regular screening tests and follow-up. It is highly curable when found and treated early.

Cervical cancer is a preventable disease

How cervical cancer develops

- Cervical cancer is caused by an infection called human papillomavirus (HPV)
- The infection leads to precancerous changes
- If untreated, precancerous changes become cervical cancer
- Cervical cancer spreads very slowly and the woman does not feel anything when it starts
- There is no pain or bleeding with precancerous changes
- Cervical cancer at final stage is difficult to treat and at high risk of death



How to prevent cervical cancer?

- Vaccinate girls prior to sexual intercourse (before they are infected by HPV)
- Screen women 30-49 years old to identify and treat precancerous lesions

HPV vaccination for girls and screening for women 30-49 years old are two main methods to protect them from HPV infection and cervical cancer.

You can prevent cervical cancer with screening

How can we tell whether the mouth of the womb is healthy or not?

- We cannot tell from the way the woman looks. It is like the ear of corn, which can look healthy from the outside.
- We cannot tell that the corn has some bad spots until the husks are removed. In the same way, we cannot tell whether the mouth of the womb is starting to change from looking at the woman.
- She can look healthy, but inside, the mouth of the womb is starting to change and the lesions are developing.
- We can tell whether the mouth of the womb is healthy or not by screening. This means



looking at the cervix here at the health facility. We look at the cervix through a special “vinegar test” called VIA to look for precancerous changes.

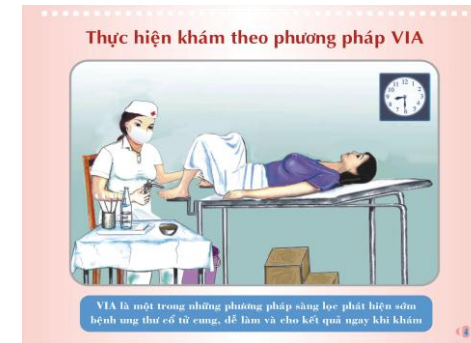
Who should get screened?

- All women between the ages of 30 and 49 years and are not pregnant, even those who have no sign of abnormality, should be screened.
- Women who are over 49 years old and those who have cervical cancer are not suitable for screening.

Women between the ages of 30 and 49 years should go to health facility for cervical cancer screening and early detection, even when there is no sign of unhealthy.

How is the VIA exam performed?

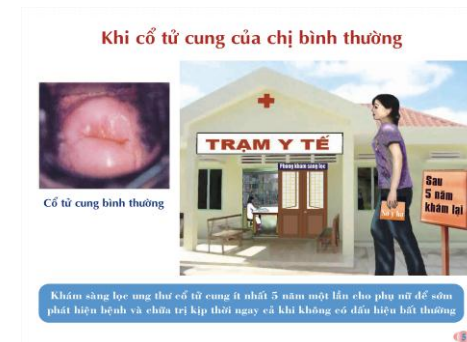
- The check-up and test will only take a short time and will not cause any pain. The test is simple. We call it VIA or the “vinegar test.”
- When you are ready, the health provider will insert an instrument called a speculum, which you see here (show picture and the actual instrument) into the vagina to keep it open so that the nurse can see inside and see the mouth of the womb.
- The instrument will be put in gently and will not cause any pain; it may feel a bit cold at first and may be a bit uncomfortable.
- Try to be relaxed and not tense up the lower part of your body and vagina. Breathe slowly and deeply to help yourself relax. The more relaxed you are, the easier it will be to put the instrument into the vagina, and the less discomfort you will feel.



- The health provider will then wipe the mouth of the womb with cotton soaked in vinegar and leave the solution on for one minute.
- You may feel a stinging or burning sensation from the vinegar (the type of sensation you feel when you apply salt to a cut wound), this is temporary and lasts only a few moments.
- The health provider will then look at the mouth of the womb using a light/torch to see if it has any unhealthy changes.
- The test is then finished. The nurse will remove the instrument and you can get up and dress.
- The provider will then tell you the results of the test.

VIA: a new, fast and easy way to protect yourself against cervical cancer

If your cervix is healthy



- It would be ideal if the cervix looks normal and healthy.
- Even if there is no problem now, a problem can start later, especially for women below 50 years.
- It takes about 5 years for HPV infection to become pre-cancerous lesions. So it is important to come back to the health facility for the check-up every FIVE YEARS.
- Remember to come back in FIVE YEARS. (Ask the clients how they can be reminded.)

Women should have cervical cancer screening done every 5 years for early detection and timely treatment, even when there is no abnormality

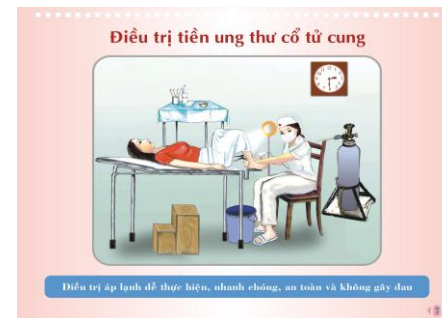
If your cervix has pre-cancer or cancer



- If there are some changes on the surface of the cervix, this means that you might have precancerous changes that need treatment.
- Do not be alarmed. Precancerous changes do not mean that you have cancer. Most precancerous changes can be treated with cryotherapy.
- Depending on what is found, several different things might happen:
 - You may be given treatment immediately (cryotherapy). The precancerous area is frozen. You can go home healthy immediately after.
 - You may be referred to the referral level health facility, if the treatment cannot be performed at this health facility.

**Precancerous changes do not mean that you have cancer.
Cryotherapy is the first recommended precancerous treatment method.**

Treatment of precancerous changes with cryotherapy



How does the treatment work?

- The health worker will apply the treatment using the cryotherapy device. They will touch the mouth of the womb with a very cold rod, which will freeze the precancerous changes on the cervix and get rid of the part that is not normal.
- The treatment will be over very quickly. You may feel some discomfort and cramps, like those you may get during periods, but they will not last long, generally 15-20 minutes.

- If the cramping does not cease, painkiller can be administered to eliminate the sensation.

Does the treatment work well?

- This treatment usually works well, although sometimes we may need to repeat the treatment or use another treatment if we find that the treatment did not remove all of the unhealthy part of the cervix.
- The treatment does not have long lasting side effects.
- The treatment does not make you sterile.

Cryotherapy is an easy, quick, safe and not painful method

Follow-up after cryotherapy

- After treatment certain symptoms might occur. They may last up to 4 weeks. Do not let these symptoms worry you.
Normal symptoms:
 - Your vagina will probably have some watery discharge.
 - You may feel pain of the type felt during monthly periods.
 - You could also experience a little bleeding, but not as much as during monthly periods.
- Return to the health centre immediately if you experience any concerns or warning signs.
- Come back after one month to make sure that you do not have any problems
- One year after your treatment, come back for another examination



It is important to avoid some things after cryotherapy

- Avoid having sexual intercourse for one month, because your cervix could be injured or get infected while it is healing.
- It is best to wait to heal, but if you cannot abstain for one month, then ask your partner to use a condom.
- Avoid putting anything, even medicine or herbs, into your vagina for a period of one month.
- Avoid doing heavy work for a few days.

Women should immediately return to the health facility if there are any warning signs, go for the check-up one month and one year after cryo treatment

Warning signs



Return to the health centre immediately if you experience any of the following warning signs:

- Bleeding with clots or bleeding heavier than your heaviest days of menstrual bleeding for more than 2 days
- Foul smelling discharge (smelly pus in your vagina)
- Very painful lower stomach pains (especially with a fever)
- Fever for more than 2 days

Immediately return to the health facility if there are any warning signs.

Referral

- If there are some changes on the surface of the cervix that cannot be treated at this facility, we will refer you to the referral-level facility

- You should go as soon as possible.

- If you are having your monthly period, wait until the heavy bleeding has passed.



- If you have a husband/partner, you may wish to discuss your visit to the referral-level facility with him and see if he can accompany you. He can then support you when he understands this problem and what the tests are about.

- In case you think that it might be difficult for you to go to the referral-level facility, let's discuss why and maybe I can help you.

Follow the guidance of health workers and go to the referral facility for recommended evaluation and treatment.