

03. Are there other causes of cervical cancer?

High-risk types of the HPV virus are the cause of cervical cancer.

However, other factors can increase the likelihood that an HPV infection develops into cervical cancer:

- * Exposure while in the womb to a medication called diethylstilbestrol (DES), which was prescribed to many women to prevent miscarriage between 1938 and 1971.

- * Infection with chlamydia or herpes simplex virus type 2 (both different types of sexually transmitted diseases).

- * A first-degree relative (mother or sister) with a history of cervical cancer, which the International Journal of Cancer reports increases personal risk three-fold.

- * Conditions that weaken the body's immune system, such as HIV/AIDS.

- * Smoking, which interferes with the body's ability to fight off infection. [In fact, one study showed that smokers are 60 percent more likely to develop cervical cancer, and former smokers are 12 percent more likely.]

- * Low levels of folic acid (a type of Vitamin B).

There also are some data that suggest that long-term use of oral contraceptives (10 or more years) may increase the risk of some types of cervical cancer.