

5 minutes might save your life

HOW TO SPOT VAGINAL CANCER

Laura was diagnosed with
vaginal cancer in 2020



The first step to being able to spot any cancer symptoms is to know your body and what is normal for you.

What is the vagina?

The vagina is an internal muscular canal which connects the outside of the body, where the vulva is, to the cervix. The vagina is where the lining of the uterus is shed during menstruation (a period) and where a baby descends during childbirth.

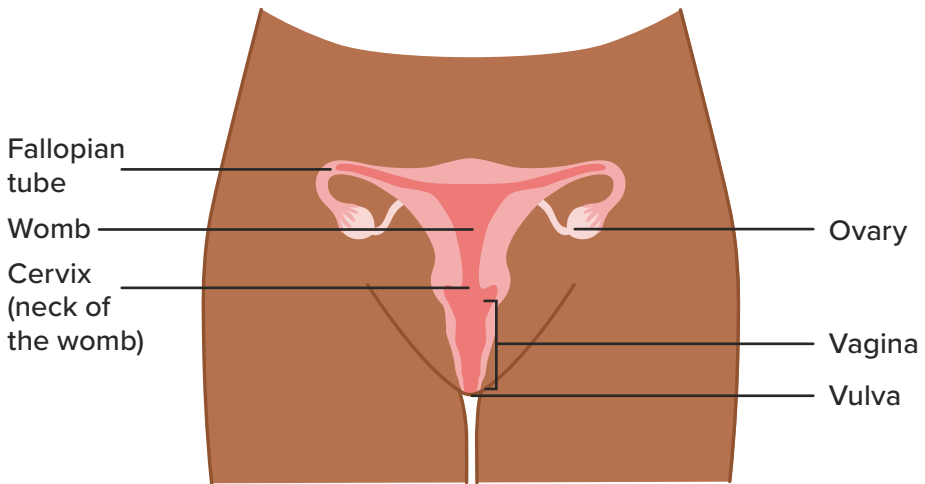


Vaginal cancer is the rarest gynaecological cancer

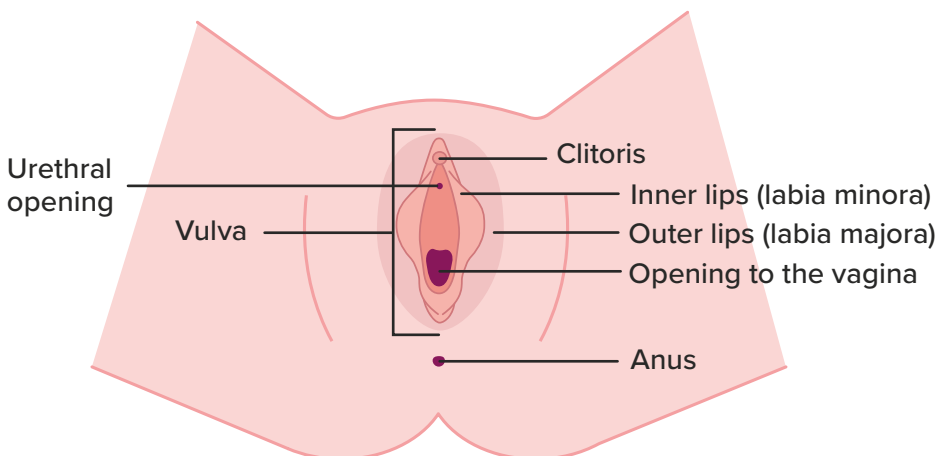
with under 300 cases per year in the UK, it accounts for less than 1 in 100 cancers diagnosed in women.

The reproductive system

You may or may not have been taught about the gynaecological organs (female reproductive system) at home or at school, but it is never too late to learn about our bodies, and how we can look after our health.



The vulva



Signs and symptoms

The signs and symptoms of vaginal cancer aren't always obvious and up to 1 in 5 people diagnosed don't have any symptoms at all. The most common changes to look out for are:

- Unexpected vaginal bleeding, e.g. between periods, after menopause or after sex
- Vaginal discharge that smells different to your normal or is blood-stained (red, pink, brown)
- Vaginal pain during sex
- A vaginal lump or growth that you can feel
- A vaginal itch that won't go away
- Pain when urinating
- Persistent pelvic and vaginal pain.

Vaginal cancer is more common over the age of 75, although it can affect anyone with a vagina at any age.

Many people with vaginal cancer have a history of either pre-cancerous cells of the cervix (CIN) or the vagina (VAIN) or cervical cancer.

Go get checked



If you have any of these symptoms, it is important that you see your GP. It is more likely to be caused by something less serious than cancer, but it is always worth getting them checked, just in case.

Risk factors

The earlier vaginal cancer is caught, the more treatment options there are available and the best possible chance someone will have of successful treatment, so knowing what to look out for and getting any concerning symptoms checked as soon as possible is really important.

You can **discuss any changes with your practice nurse or GP when you attend your cervical screening.**

If you no longer have cervical screening or it is not due, do not wait, go and speak to your GP or nurse about your concerns.

3 in 4 vaginal cancer cases in the UK are caused by human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is a very common group of viruses, that are transmitted through sexual contact, and normally do not cause problems, but in some cases low-risk types can lead to genital warts and high-risk types can cause certain types of cancers.

You can find out more about HPV at **eveappeal.org.uk/hpv**

You're more likely to develop cancer of the vagina if you've previously been found to have abnormal precancerous cells in your cervix or vagina – known as cervical intraepithelial neoplasia (CIN) and vaginal intraepithelial neoplasia (VAIN). Both are closely linked to having a persistent HPV infection.

Stopping smoking will reduce your risk of developing VAIN and vaginal cancer as smoking makes the immune system less able to clear the HPV virus from your body.

Diethylstilbestrol (DES) if your birth mother took diethylstilbestrol during pregnancy you will have a 1 in 1000 chance of getting vaginal cancer.

66 **I'm so young to get vaginal cancer, but it happens. It is always worth getting checked, just in case.**

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For more information



You can visit our website
for more information

eveappeal.org.uk/vaginal

This leaflet is one of a series on the five gynaecological cancers – womb, ovarian, cervical, vulval and vaginal. If you have any questions or concerns about any symptoms you are having we run a **free** and confidential nurse-led information service, called Ask Eve. You can get in touch on **0808 802 0019** or email **nurse@eveappeal.org.uk**



@eveappeal

The Eve Appeal is the leading gynaecological cancer charity. To help save lives, we focus on preventing and improving the early diagnosis of womb, ovarian, cervical, vulval and vaginal cancer.

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All information correct at time of publication. Sources available on request.

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