

5 minutes might save your life

HOW TO SPOT VULVAL CANCER

Mandy was diagnosed with
vulval cancer in 2012



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 vulva?

The vulva is the name for the external female genitals, which you can see between the legs. It includes the lips surrounding the vaginal opening (labia minora and labia majora), the vaginal opening, and urethral opening (where you wee from), the clitoris and the Bartholin's glands (two glands either side of the vagina that release lubricating fluid).



1,500 women

women and people with gynae organs are affected by vulval cancer per year in the UK.

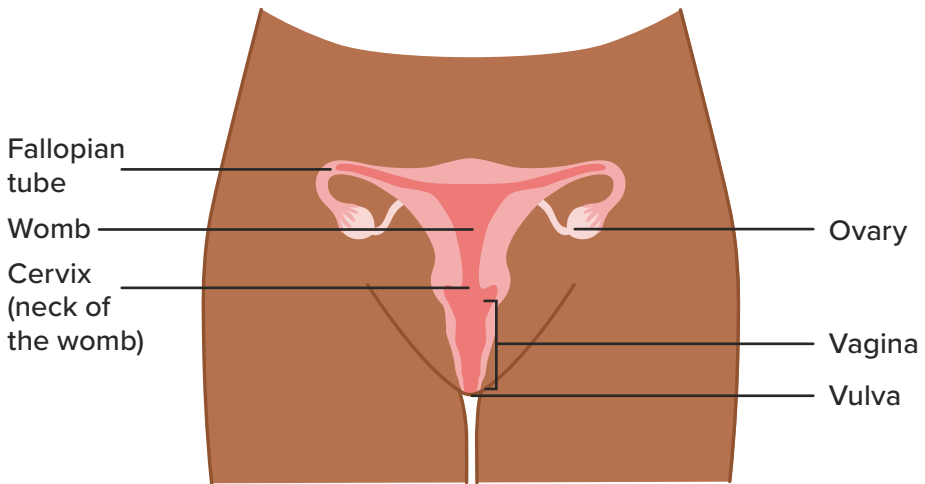


More than 40%

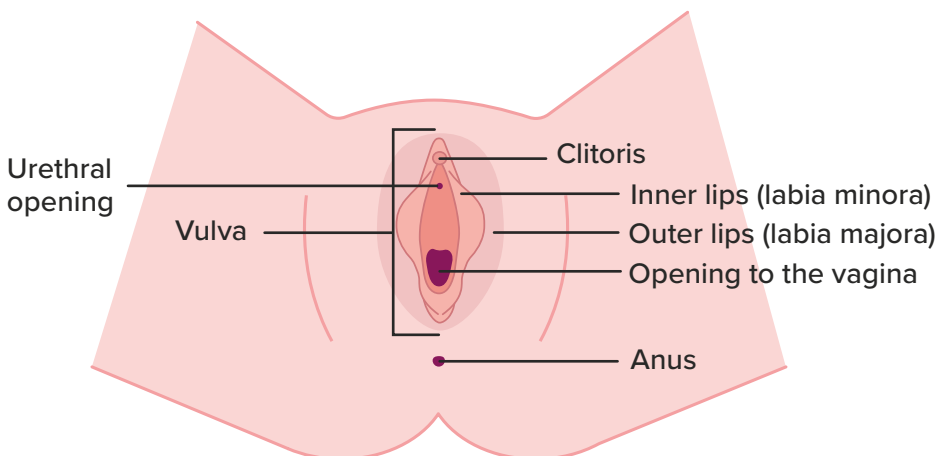
of vulval cancers are in women and people aged 75 and over, although it can happen at any age.

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 vulval cancer aren't always obvious but the most common changes to look out for are:

- An itch in the vulva that doesn't go away
- Pain or soreness in the vulva
- Thickened, raised, red, lighter (which can be white or yellow depending on the colour of your skin) or darker patches on the skin of the vulva
- An open sore or growth visible on the skin
- A mole on the vulva that changes shape or colour
- A lump or swelling in the vulva
- Bleeding from the vulva
- A blood-stained discharge.

Nearly 7 in 10 vulval cancers in the UK are caused by human papillomavirus (HPV) infection.

HPV is a very common group of viruses that are transmitted through sexual contact. They do not normally cause problems, but in some cases low-risk types can lead to genital warts and high-risk types can cause certain types of cancers.

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.

Reducing your risk

The earlier vulval 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.

Check your vulva regularly (using a mirror and a good light). Everyone's vulva looks and smells differently so it is important to know what is normal for you. If you notice any changes or you experience any symptoms, it is important that you see your GP.

Vulval cancer can develop from pre-cancer cells, called vulval intraepithelial neoplasia (VIN), which if found can be treated.

Stopping smoking will reduce your risk of developing VIN and vulval cancer, this is because smoking makes the immune system less able to clear the HPV virus from your body. You can find out more about HPV at eveappeal.org.uk/hpv

Vulval cancer can also be associated with other skin conditions, particularly lichen sclerosus, that causes itching and white or pale shiny patches of skin.

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

If you have already consulted your GP but the **symptoms persist or worsen, it is important to return to your doctor** and let them know. You can also get in touch with our Ask Eve nurse service for support (details at the end of the leaflet).

66 **Know your normal, check your vulva each time you check your breasts. It could save your life.**

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For more information



You can visit our website
for more information

eveappeal.org.uk/vulval

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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