



To News Editors
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CUHK Research Shows 1 in 5 Throat Cancer Patients in HK is HPV infected Public Screening Test to Study Oral HPV infection

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is commonly known as the cause of cervical cancer, but very few people realise its relation with throat cancer. In the light of an observed increasing trend in HPV-associated oropharyngeal cancer in Western countries, the Faculty of Medicine of The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) has led a study, in collaboration with public hospitals, to examine the prevalence of this disease in Hong Kong. The findings were published in the medical journal *Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention* in January 2016.

HPV-infected throat cancer patients are younger, likely non-smoker or drinker

The study analysed 207 oropharyngeal cancer patients under the care of 11 public hospitals during 2005–2009, mainly from the Prince of Wales Hospital, Yan Chai Hospital and Queen Mary Hospital. The study revealed that 1 in 5 of the patients (21%) is associated with HPV infection. When compared with the HPV-negative ones, they are younger with a mean age of 60 years, and less likely to be smokers and drinkers.

Also, patients with HPV-positive throat cancer usually present with a smaller and earlier primary tumour. The cancerous cells are less likely to spread to other parts of the body but are more likely to cause enlarged neck lymph nodes. The five-year survival rate after treatment doubles that of the HPV-negative ones, regardless of treatment modality.

Dr. Eddy Wai Hung LAM, Honorary Clinical Assistant Professor, Department of Otorhinolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery, Faculty of Medicine said, ‘Due to the special characteristics of HPV-positive throat cancer, the patients may be treated by newer forms of operation with fewer side effects. I advise persons with enlarged neck mass, persistent throat discomfort, earaches, blood stained saliva or painful swallowing to consult a doctor.’

Public screening launched to help study local HPV oral infection

Professor Paul Kay Sheung CHAN, Chairman, Department of Microbiology, Faculty of Medicine said, ‘Twenty percent of human cancers are caused by viruses. Understanding more about cancer-associated viruses, such as HPV, will help to find new tools for cancer screening and new vaccines for prevention.’

‘HPV Research & Education Consortium @ CU Medicine’ formed by a group of researchers at the Faculty of Medicine, CUHK, shares a common interest in understanding HPV infection and exploring ways to solve health problems associated with the virus.

The group is now launching a public screening in order to understand more about oral HPV infection. The project aims to invite 3,000 members of the public to undergo a simple test which consists of a survey on daily habits and the collection of an oral sample.

Professor Martin Chi Sang WONG, Division of Family Medicine and Primary Health Care, The Jockey Club School of Public Health and Primary Care, Faculty of Medicine calls for public support, ‘As we see an increasing trend in HPV-associated oropharyngeal cancer in Western countries, we worry that this may also happen to Hong Kong in the near future. Therefore, we want to understand who is at risk of oral HPV infection and whether HPV testing would be helpful to screen throat cancer patients.’

The public screening test aims to invite 3,000 Hong Kong permanent residents aged 18-64. Those who wish to participate can call the hotline 8102 7788 or email microbiology@cuhk.edu.hk.

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