European Commission

EC-CvC at a Glance

EUROPEAN COMMISSION INITIATIVE ON CERVICAL CANCER

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AN INITIATIVE TO TACKLE CERVICAL CANCER

WHAT IS EC-CvC?

In 2008 the European Parliament and Council developed a strategy to support Member States in reducing the cancer burden, with a particular focus on the most frequent cancers. This was followed by the European Commission's Beating Cancer Plan, and the launch of the EC Initiative on Cervical Cancer (EC-CvC).

Cervical cancer is a largely preventable disease and remains a leading cause of cancer mortality among European women under 45 years. EC-CvC aims to enhance the quality and effectiveness of cervical cancer care throughout Europe, from screening and effectiveness of diagnosis to treatment and palliative care.

This is achieved through developing evidence-based recommendations for cervical cancer screening and diagnosis (European Cervical Cancer Prevention Guidelines) and a voluntary European Quality Assurance (QA) Scheme for cervical cancer care services.

All EC-CvC products are publicly available and free to access on the EC-CvC website.[1] The materials are clearly written and presented in technical and non-technical language and terminology tailored to its target audiences.

1 EC-CvC Internet address: cancer-screening-and-care.jrc.ec.europa.eu/en/ec-cvc

WHY IS THERE A NEED FOR THIS INITIATIVE?

Europe's Beating Cancer Plan put forward supporting actions for Member States to ensure that 90% of the EU population who qualify for cervical cancer screening are offered screening by 2025. Along with Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccination and access to treatment, this is an important step towards cervical cancer elimination and the World Health Organisation (WHO) suggests that it is achievable by the end of the century.

To realise these goals, cervical cancer screening and prevention guidelines need to be updated and adapted for increasingly diverse population groups, including:

- HPV-vaccinated cohorts reaching screening age,
- socio-economically disadvantaged and minority populations (including people with diverse genders) who face barriers in accessing healthcare.

WHO WILL BENEFIT?

EC-CvC activities will ultimately benefit all women and individuals with a cervix. By ensuring an essential level of quality in cervical cancer care services based around patients' needs, the initiative aims to help reduce inequalities in healthcare delivery, improve effectiveness of screening programs, patients' quality of life and survival.

HOW IS THE INITIATIVE IMPLEMENTED?

In line with parallel European initiatives on breast and colorectal cancers, EC-CvC's quality assurance scheme defines requirements for cervical cancer services for all stages of care, and incorporates quality indicators and performance measures to assess compliance. The quality assurance scheme is developed alongside the European Guidelines that provide evidence-based recommendations for screening and diagnosis.

Certification will be conducted under an accredited framework, operating within the guidelines of EU Regulation No 765/2008 to maintain consistency between European countries. This certification process will be overseen by independent third-party organisations, including National Accreditation Bodies and Certification Bodies.

Organisations and healthcare authorities can apply for certification under the European QA scheme, with provisions made for recognising other existing schemes.

The initiative is being developed in collaboration with the European Commission's Joint Research Centre that oversees the harmonised development of European guidelines and QA schemes for organised population-based cancer screening and follow-up care. The alignment will ensure clarity and prevent duplication of effort.

EUROPEAN CERVICAL CANCER PREVENTION GUIDELINES

KEY FEATURES

- Developed by a multi-disciplinary panel of experts and patients using a transparent process and an evidence-based, reproducible methodology
- Available on-line and regularly updated
- Applicable for population-based screening

The European Cervical Cancer Prevention Guidelines include evidence-based recommendations and good practice statements, aimed at improving standards of care for vaccination against HPV infection, and screening and diagnosis of cervical precancerous lesions.

These guidelines are based on systematic reviews of evidence, and defined by a multi-disciplinary panel of experts known as the EC-CvC working group, which includes patients and their representatives. The guidelines offer clear explanations of care options, including benefits and risks, and rate both the quality of evidence and the strength of recommendation associated with each intervention.

A strong recommendation means that most people in this situation would want and should receive the recommended course of action, and that the

recommendation can be adapted as a policy in most situations.

A conditional recommendation means that the majority of people would want the recommended course of action, but many would not.

Clinicians can use the guidelines to help patients make a decision based on informed consent, and for policy makers, a substantial debate is needed that involves stakeholders.

These recommendations and good practice statements are presented in a Q&A format and grouped by topic. They are accessible on-line for healthcare professionals, patients, and policymakers.

WHAT DO THE EUROPEAN CERVICAL CANCER PREVENTION GUIDELINES LOOK LIKE?

Each recommendation in the European Cervical Cancer Prevention Guidelines contains the following sections:

1. **Healthcare question**
2. **Final recommendation**
3. **Strength of the recommendation**
   Strong or conditional recommendation, high, moderate, low or very low certainty of the evidence.
4. **Justification**
5. **Considerations on specific population sub-groups**
6. **Considerations for implementation and policy making**
7. **Monitoring and evaluation**
8. **Research priorities**
9. **Supporting material**
   - **Evidence to Decision:** recommendation justifications, considerations and assessments,
   - **Evidence Profile:** quality assessments of the evidence from literature reviews and a summary of findings,
   - **Bibliography**.
10. **Summary information**

UPDATING STRATEGY

The European Cervical Cancer Prevention Guidelines are regularly monitored and updated to incorporate new scientific evidence.

The updating process is modular and subdivided into phases, including prioritisation, surveillance, updating, and publication. Each recommendation can go through one of more of these phases depending on the new evidence available.

THE EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE (QA) SCHEME

KEY FEATURES

- Quality, safety and training requirements for cervical cancer care services and professionals
- Topics covered include organised, population-based screening, diagnosis, treatment, and end-of-life care
- Voluntary, flexible and modular implementation

The European QA scheme defines a common set of quality and safety requirements and standards for cervical cancer care services across Europe. Its aim is to improve health outcomes.

The European QA scheme is the vehicle for the implementation of the European guidelines and improving cancer care.

The scheme will be freely available to all cervical cancer care services, including hospitals, clinics, diagnostic centres, and others.

Cervical cancer screening and care involves a range of different healthcare services, depending on the individual course of the disease. From organised population-based vaccination and screening programs to end-of-life care, the scheme encompasses all care processes in cervical cancer management.

The European QA scheme is structured as a patient-centred journey of cervical cancer care, mapping out the services involved at each stage of the patient's care delivery, from initial entry to possible endpoints.

Cervical cancer care processes covered by the European QA scheme

REQUIREMENTS

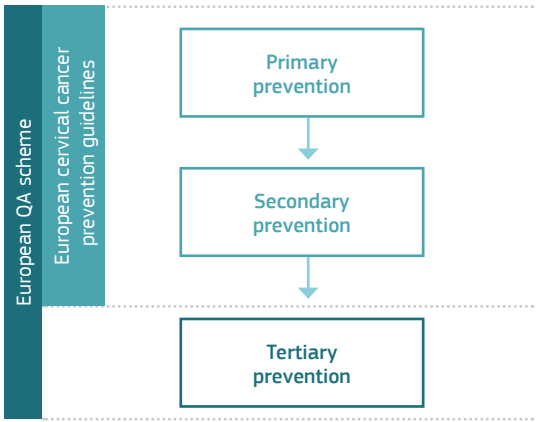
The scheme requirements are definable, measurable and actionable. They relate directly to the maintenance, restoration or improvement of health, and relate to one or more of the following quality domains:

- clinical effectiveness,
- facilities, resources and workforce,
- personal empowerment and experience,
- safety.

Each requirement in the European QA scheme comprises:

- a statement,
- detailed information on what is measured and how,
- corresponding supporting evidence and references.

Cervical cancer care services that fulfil the European QA scheme requirements will obtain a recognised certificate.



Scope of the European Quality Assurance Scheme and European Cervical Cancer Prevention Guidelines

DEVELOPING THE EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE SCHEME

The European QA scheme is the result of cooperative work. The EC-CvC Working Group brings together a panel of international professional experts in all areas of cervical cancer care and quality assurance, as well as patients.

Requirements are developed based on systematic reviews of existing literature, databases and other quality assurance schemes. Additionally, new requirements may be formulated in areas where the expert group identifies a need for quality improvements.

Requirements are evaluated for:

- scientific soundness, including certainty assessment of the underlying evidence,
- responsiveness to changes in the service or quality improvement,
- feasibility of implementation.

IMPLEMENTING THE EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE SCHEME

The European QA scheme allows for voluntary adoption, and offers flexibility and modularity in its implementation to accommodate varying contexts and capacities of cervical cancer care services.

The European QA scheme for cervical cancer will be freely accessible to all interested cervical cancer care services worldwide, including hospitals, clinics, and diagnostic centres, promoting standardised quality care.

CERTIFICATION

Cervical cancer care services that fulfil the quality assurance requirements can be certified. This certification covers all cervical cancer care processes, using the step-wise and modular approach defined by EC-CvC.

Services that outsource certain processes can also be certified. In these circumstances, legal agreements must be in place, and all outsourced processes have to comply with the requirements of the European QA scheme.

To demonstrate compliance, cervical cancer care services will be audited. Auditing is carried out by independent certification bodies accredited by National Accreditation Bodies. Accreditation ensures that all bodies can perform harmonised independent audits, across borders if required. It is envisaged therefore that the European QA scheme will follow ISO/IEC/17065 for accrediting certification bodies.

Auditors will assess whether the European QA scheme requirements are fulfilled by different means, including remote checking of documents/reports and on-site visits in the cervical cancer care services, the review of medical records, interviews with service staff, etc.

Cervical cancer care services can also follow the European QA scheme requirements to improve their current performance without seeking certification, or in view of obtaining it later on.

ADDITIONAL TOOLS

KEY FEATURES

- Support implementation of the European Cervical Cancer Prevention Guidelines and European QA Scheme
- Available online and free-of-charge
- Can be used independently from certification

Additional resources are available to support implementation of the EC-CvC. All these are also free to access on the EC-CvC website and are designed to complement both the European guidelines and the European QA scheme. They can also be used as stand-alone resources to monitor and improve the quality of cervical cancer care.

EUROPEAN CERVICAL CANCER PREVENTION GUIDELINES

Monitoring and evaluation indicators

A number of perfomance indicators are included for each recommendation for monitoring and evaluation purposes

These indicators are selected for their responsiveness, feasibility and certainty of the evidence.

EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE (QA) SCHEME

Manual for services, European QA scheme owners and certification bodies

The manual will contain information on how to implement the European QA scheme, such as description of the requirements, auditing process, and how to prepare and request certification.

Self-assessment tool

A self-assessment tool will help services to determine the preparedness of cervical cancer care services to comply with the requirements of the European QA scheme, and to identify what they need to do to achieve compliance.

Services can then apply for formal recognition of compliance, which will be assessed by independent bodies recognised by the scheme.

Quality indicators computation

Technical specifications will be available to help cervical cancer care services to compute indicators in a standardised manner, to measure compliance with the European QA scheme developed by EC-CvC. Services not looking for certification can also use these specifications to assess or improve their current performance.

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