Cervical Cancer Outlook

The risk for cervical cancer is lower for women living with HIV on treatment.

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Among women living with HIV, those taking antiretroviral (ARV) treatment have lower rates of human papillomavirus (HPV)–related negative health outcomes, according to a meta-analysis of 31 studies including data on thousands of women.

After adjusting the data for CD4 count and the duration of ARV treatment, the researchers found that compared with women who did not start ARVs, those on HIV treatment had a 17 percent lower risk of high-risk HPV infection.

Being on HIV treatment was also associated with a 41 percent lower risk of precancerous cells on the cervix, a 36 percent reduced risk in the progression of mildly abnormal cervical cell changes, a 54 percent increased likelihood of the regression of potentially precancerous cervical cell changes and a 60 percent reduction in the rate of diagnosis of invasive cervical cancer.

“Our study highlights the importance of frequent screening of women living with HIV who have a higher risk of [precancerous cervical cells] compared to HIV uninfected women,” says the study’s lead author, Helen Kelly, PhD, an assistant professor in the clinical research department at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. She also stressed the beneficial effects of starting ARV treatment and adhering to that drug regimen.

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