

Metro Now

VIRUS ON THE LOOSE NOW GETTING 'EM EARLY

CANCER CURSE STALKS YOUNG 'ACTIVE' GIRLS

Doctors say cervical cancer among young women is on the rise, cite multiple partners as villain no. 1

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Kanika Sharma is 18, hip and happening in her social network. With a lifestyle that needs plenty of disposable income, she enjoys every day of her life. She works in a BPO company for long hours, lives alone and is sexually active. She also has multiple partners.

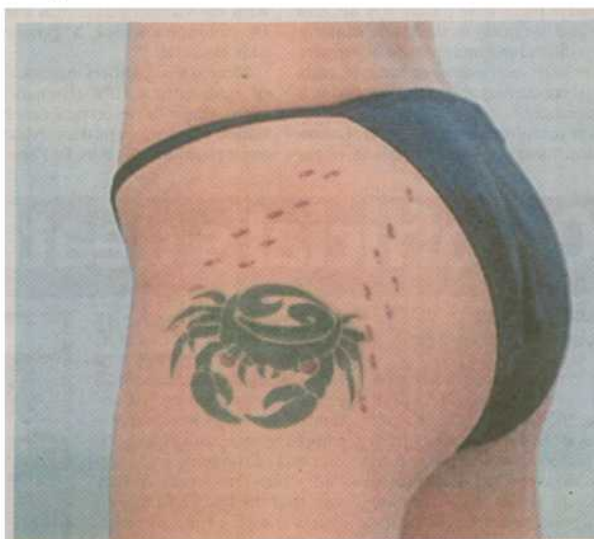
Everything was hunky-dory for her till the day she noticed a "pimple" in her genital area. Initially, she did not bother much. However, when the "pimple" began growing, she became worried. On visiting a gynaecologist, she couldn't believe what the doctor told her.

The doctor informed her that what she was referring to as a pimple could bring her face to face

with something deadlier: cervical cancer.

Kanika is not the only one. The same is the case with Purnima Kapoor, Shweta Aggarwal and many other young women in the city.

"Such cases are alarmingly on the rise in BPO hubs like Noida and Gurgaon. I had not seen a single such case in the residential area where I work, but have seen several in the last few months of my practice in Noida alone. On detailed questioning, they admit that it is a lifestyle thing for them. With long, and often odd, working hours, plenty of disposable income at a young age, and a Western lifestyle imbibed from their foreign clients—all these have contributed to sex becoming free and with it resultant diseases," says Dr Shivani Sachdev Gour, consultant gynaecologist at Fortis La Femme Hospital. **PAGE 2**



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'ACTIVE' AIN'T SO GOOD FOR GIRLS

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"All the three girls I saw in as many months were very young. I was shocked to hear what they told me. All were outstation BPO employees and said they had sex mostly with their seniors at work in order to enhance their careers. Most of the men are already married and these girls are unaware that their partners could spread the deadly infection. Since it takes about six weeks for a wart to grow, they come to us at a much later stage. Apart from cervical cancer there are other sexually transmitted diseases like Molluscum and Candidiasis which are prevalent in these youngsters. Unwanted pregnancy has become common. While I dealt with such cases abroad, I had no idea that it would become so common in India as well," she added.

Dr Asha Sharma, Head of Department, Obstetrics & Gynaecology, Rockland Hospital, agrees that cervical cancer among young working women is definitely on the rise. "Just a week ago, I examined two patients working for an airline. One was 32 and the other 33. And they both had cervical cancer."

Comparing the situation with 10 years earlier, Dr Sharma says, "I never got to see any young woman with cervical cancer but now I get to see one patient every two months. Those days there were hardly any BPOs or MNCs and not many women were working. Women didn't have multiple sexual partners. But now with such a modern lifestyle, casual sexual encounters are on the rise and so is cervical cancer."

When young women come to Dr Sharma, they don't suspect that it is cancer of the

Doctors say more sexual partners increase the chances of transmitting HPV, which causes cervical cancer. Early initiation of sex weakens the cervical wall making it prone to infection.

cervix. "It is only during the examination and other tests that we know that the woman is suffering from cervical cancer. Family history of cervical cancer also plays a role," she adds.

Dr Amit Bhargava, Senior Oncologist at Max Healthcare, says, "Abnormal vaginal bleeding, heavy menstrual discharge, pelvic pain should not be ignored by women especially over 40 years of age." Women should immediately opt for a pap smear screening as soon as they complain of the above mentioned symptoms.

"Earlier, it was an uneducated housewife with poor menstrual hygiene, now it is her educated urban counterpart because of early initiation of sex and multiple sex partners who are victims of cervical cancer," says Dr Anuradha Kapur, a gynaecologist at Max Hospital.

More sexual partners increase the chances of transmitting HPV (Human Papilloma virus), which causes cervical cancer. Early initiation of sex weakens the cervical wall making it prone to infection, Dr Kapur said.

Dr Sadhana Kala, a gynaecologist at Moolchand Hospital, says, "With education, menstrual hygiene has improved. So, the burden of cervical cancer should ideally reduce. But because of early and multiple sex partners, the burden of cervical cancer is not going down. The cure rate, though, has increased because of early screening."

Gynaecologists say, while diseases from the West have been adopted by us in India, actual healthcare systems are found to be severely lacking. So in the UK where all women get letters sent at home if they do not have regular pap smear tests done, there is no such system in India. Young women have no clue that once they are sexually active, they are at risk of deadly diseases that a simple pap smear can pick up and timely treatment can result in complete cure.



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