

Media Release

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CALLING ALL GIRLS: **BUTT OUT**

Observing National Youth Tobacco Free Day (19 March), Marie Stopes International has urged all teenage girls to protect their reproductive health and give cigarettes the flick.

Their calls come following studies reporting that cigarettes combined with the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) infection can greatly increase a female's risk of developing cervical cancer.

"Research shows that girls continue to outnumber boys when it comes to cigarette smoking," said Jill Michelson, Operations Manager for Marie Stopes International.

"Current smoking rates indicated that 10% of girls aged 12 to 17 are partaking in the habit, with 17% of 17 year old girls smoking.¹

"To add to these frightening figures, scientists have recently found that smokers with high levels of HPV infection had a 27-fold increased risk of cervical cancer compared to smokers with no HPV.²

"In comparison, high-level HPV infection only increased the risk of cervical cancer by six-fold in non-smokers.

"There was also a link between the duration of smoking and cancer, with long-term smokers more likely to have an HPV infection causing cervical cancer.

"If mouth cancer, lung cancer, heart disease and the many other tobacco related diseases aren't enough to make teenage girls quit smoking, hopefully these findings will be."

HPV is a common infection occurring typically in women between the ages of 18 to 30. The virus is spread via genital skin-to-skin contact, so using condoms or other barrier methods does not prevent transmission. In most cases the body takes between one and two years to clear the virus naturally.

"Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer in women worldwide, and HPV is found in almost all cases," Ms Michelson said.

"It is therefore imperative that women have a Pap smear every two years so that cell changes can be identified and either monitored or treated well before they may become cancerous."

"It is also important to remember that the cervical cancer vaccine doesn't prevent all cervical cancers, so regular Pap smears are still essential.

"The crucial thing about screening is to make it a regular part of your life and to continue to screen routinely until you are 70 years old.

"Early detection and a smoke-free lifestyle is the best prevention when it comes to cervical cancer."

For more information on pap smears, visit your doctor or call Marie Stopes International on 1800 003 707. For help and advice on quitting smoking, call the Quitline on 131 848.

About Marie Stopes International: Marie Stopes International is a not-for-profit sexual and reproductive healthcare provider, with centres in the ACT, Victoria, Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia. The organisation offers a range of services, including abortion, vasectomy, sexually transmitted infection check-ups and contraception. Surplus proceeds from Australian activities support the work of the Marie Stopes International Partnership, which delivers sexual and reproductive health services to over four million people in 38 countries worldwide.

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¹ NSW Department of Health. The Health of the People of New South Wales. Report of the New South Wales Chief Health Officer 2006

² Synergy between Cigarette Smoking and Human Papillomavirus Type 16 in Cervical Cancer In situ Development, Cancer Epidemiology Biomarkers & Prevention Vol. 15, 2141-2147, November 2006