

## **Cervical cancer can be avoided**

Cervical cancer is widespread among Hong Kong women despite it being one of the most preventable cancers. A study conducted in Hong Kong sheds some light on this situation. It shows Chinese women here have little knowledge, about this disease and often have the wrong ideas about it.

Persistent human papillomavirus (HPV) infection is the chief cause of cervical cancer. The infection often occurs after a woman has had her first sexual intercourse. It can go undetected because of the lack of symptoms, and in most cases the virus is naturally cleared by the body. Only persistent high risk HPV infections, known to doctors as HPV 16, 18, 31, 33, 45, 51, 52, 58 & 59 and others, may lead to cervical cancer.

A vaccine that combats two types of HPVs, 16 and 18, is now available. These HPVs are responsible for nearly 70 per cent of cervical cancers around the world. The vaccine is best given to women prior to their first sexual intercourse. It can also help women who have sexual experience, but its effect varies from case to case.

Since vaccination is not 100 per cent effective against HPV infection, regular check-ups, a healthy lifestyle and practicing safer sex are crucial to preventing cervical cancer.