

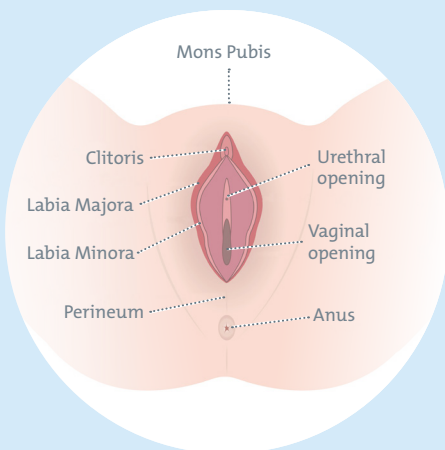
What are vaginal and vulvar cancers?

Vaginal cancer and vulvar cancer are rare in Australia.

Vaginal cancer arises in the tissues of the vagina. There are two main types of vaginal cancer: primary vaginal cancer and secondary vaginal cancer.

Secondary vaginal cancer is more common and means that the cancer has spread to the vagina from another location, such as the cervix, uterus, vulva, bladder, bowel or nearby organs.

Vulvar cancer occurs in any external area of the female genitals, including the labia majora, labia minora, perineum, clitoris, mons pubis, Bartholin gland or anus.



Signs and symptoms

It is natural and common for changes to occur to your body as you age. We encourage you to recognise what is normal for your body and if changes are persistent consult your GP.

Vaginal and vulvar cancer symptoms can include:

- > itching, burning, tenderness or pain around the vulva
- > a lump, sore, swelling or growth on the vulva
- > thickened or raised red, white or dark brown skin patches
- > a vulvar mole that changes colour or shape
- > blood, pus or discharge from an area of skin or sore spot in the vulva, with an offensive or unusual smell or colour, unrelated to your period
- > swollen lymph nodes in the groin.

The vulva and vagina are difficult to see without a mirror. If you are experiencing symptoms but are uncomfortable examining your genitals, visit your GP for a check-up.

Common tests used to diagnose vaginal and vulvar cancer

Physical examination

Your GP or specialist may perform a general physical examination to understand your current health. This may include an examination of your vagina, groin and pelvic area and may include an internal pelvic floor examination.

Blood test

Your doctor may order several blood tests to check your overall health and to detect proteins produced by cancer cells. These proteins are called tumour markers.

Ultrasound

An ultrasound may be one of the first tests following a blood test and physical exam. Your doctor may recommend an abdominal and/or a transvaginal ultrasound.

Abdominal ultrasound

The sonographer moves a small device (transducer) over your abdominal area.

Transvaginal ultrasound

A small transducer wand is inserted into the vagina to provide a clearer picture of both ovaries, and the uterus, bladder and bowel.

Biopsy

A colposcope and hysteroscope are magnifying instruments used to look closely at the vagina, cervix, vulva and uterus.

Tissue samples are taken and looked at under a microscope to determine if cancer cells are present.

Biopsies may be performed via:

- > colposcopy – to take a sample from the cervix.
- > hysteroscopy – to take a sample from the vagina or vaginal lining.
- > laparoscopy or laparotomy (open procedure) – to take a sample of lesions in the pelvis or abdomen.

Medical imaging

Depending on the type of cancer being investigated, your doctor may order an MRI, CT or PET scan. Upon formal diagnosis, medical imaging will allow your care team to examine and stage cancer.

Treatment options

Depending on the stage and type of cancer, your treatment plan may recommend surgery, chemotherapy prior to or after surgery, or a combination of chemotherapy and radiotherapy. Some cancers are cured with surgery alone and others require a combination of treatments.

Surgery

Surgery is often first line treatment for vaginal and vulvar cancer that has not spread beyond the uterus.

Types of vulvar cancer surgery:

Excisional biopsy

The removal of the entire tumour along with a small amount of surrounding healthy tissue.

Wide local excision

The removal of the tumour and a wider area of surrounding tissue to ensure all cancer cells are removed

Radical vulvectomy

A more extensive surgery that involves the removal of the entire vulva, including the clitoris, labia majora, and labia minora.

Radical hysterectomy

A surgical procedure to treat advanced vulvar cancer. The uterus, cervix and part of the vagina are removed along with the vulva.

Types of vaginal cancer surgery:

Local excision

The removal of a small amount of tissue from the surface of the vagina where the cancer is located.

Partial vaginectomy

The removal of the part of the vagina where the cancer is located, while preserving as much of the healthy tissue as possible.

Radical vaginectomy

A more extensive surgery that involves the removal of the entire vagina, including the cancerous tissue, and often also involves the removal of nearby lymph nodes.

Pelvic exenteration

A major surgical procedure to treat advanced vaginal cancer. This involves the removal of all organs in the pelvic region, including the vagina, cervix, uterus, ovaries, and bladder.

Radiotherapy

People with vaginal cancer are often recommended radiotherapy as their first line of treatment. Radiotherapy is the use of radiation (X-rays) to kill or injure cancer cells.

Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy is a common form of treatment involving the use of anti-cancer drugs to kill or slow the growth of cancer cells. Chemotherapy is often used alongside other treatments such as radiotherapy and surgery.

Your care team

Throughout your cancer journey, your team will involve a gynaecological oncologist and nursing and allied health staff. You may also see other specialists, such as a radiation oncologist or medical oncologist.

Your care team is here to provide you with comprehensive treatment, access to talented, caring specialists and support for you, and your family, during this challenging time.

Why choose Epworth for cancer care?

No one wants to experience cancer. *Our goal is to support you.*

You can expect a trusted specialist who will listen to your concerns and discuss the latest treatment options available for you to choose from. You will receive care in comfortable, nurturing spaces where your loved ones can be a part of your journey.

Your own team of experts – doctors, nurses and allied health professionals – will focus on your wellbeing. **Ask your GP for a referral to Epworth.**

Choose your Epworth vaginal and vulvar cancer specialist



Click
or scan the
QR code



- > Gynaecological oncologists
- > Medical oncologists
- > Radiation oncology service

Epworth locations for cancer care

We are Victoria's largest not-for-profit private hospital group, renowned for excellence in diagnosis, treatment, care and rehabilitation. You will find specialist wards, imaging, pathology, and more, all onsite.

Get access to:

- > Your choice of specialist and location.
- > Timely screening, investigation and diagnosis.
- > Treatment (including surgery, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, targeted treatment and clinical trials).
- > Modern inpatient and day oncology facilities.
- > Multidisciplinary care with experts across specialties.

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Phone 03 9483 3833

Epworth Geelong

1 Epworth Place
Waurm Ponds VIC 3216
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Epworth Richmond

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Richmond VIC 3121
Phone 03 9426 666

To become an Epworth patient, ask your GP for a referral to an Epworth specialist.



For more information about vaginal and vulvar cancer visit epworth.org.au/oncology