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New study shows IUDs may protect against cervical cancer

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A comprehensive study from the Keck School of Medicine of USC finds that intrauterine devices may decrease the incidence of cervical cancer by a third.

Singapore - Considered a safe and highly effective contraception method, intrauterine devices (IUDs) may also be quietly offering protection against the third-most common cancer in women worldwide. A new study from the Keck School of Medicine of USC has found that IUD use is associated with a dramatic decrease in the incidence of cervical cancer.

The systematic review, published in Obstetrics & Gynecology, is the first to combine data from multiple studies on IUDs and cervical cancer. The analysis included data from 16 high-quality observational studies involving more than 12,000 women worldwide. Results showed that in women who used an IUD, the incidence of cervical cancer was a third lower.

"The pattern we found was stunning. It was not subtle at all," says the study's lead author, Victoria Cortessis, PhD, associate professor of clinical preventive medicine at the Keck School. "The possibility that a woman could experience some help with cancer control at the same time she is making contraception decisions could potentially be very, very impactful."

Averting a looming global health crisis

The number of women diagnosed with cervical cancer is steadily rising. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 528,000 women were diagnosed with cervical cancer worldwide in 2012, and 266,000 women died from the disease. By 2035, the WHO projects that those numbers will climb to more than 756,000 and 416,000, respectively.

For women in developing countries, where cervical cancer prevention resources such as the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine or regular cervical screenings are scarce, and where populations are increasing rapidly, a contraceptive that offers protection against cervical cancer could have a profound effect, Cortessis explains.