**Cervical screening still vital for those who have had HPV vaccine**

An Atherstone woman is urging everyone to make the time for their cervical screening, after having abnormal cells discovered during her first test.

Alice Edwards, who works for Warwickshire County Council’s Road Safety Education team, discovered she had low-grade abnormal cells, due to HPV, when she attended her first cervical screening appointment in 2020.

The 26-year-old said: “For anyone that has not had it, just go. It is two minutes that can save your life.

“I can’t think of a single reason why you wouldn’t - it’s not nice, it’s not like going for a massage, but it doesn’t hurt, just uncomfortable for two minutes. Even if you get a positive result it means you can start to do something about it, if it’s growing inside you then it is only going to get worse.”

Alice was part of one of the first cohorts of girls to be offered the HPV vaccine during Year 8 at school. The HPV vaccine is extremely successful in reducing the risk of cervical cancer. The vaccine does not reduce the risk completely, which is why it is still vital that women who have had the HPV vaccine still attend their cervical screening regularly.

When Alice first received her invitation for a cervical screening she did not hesitate to get it booked.

She said: “For me the massive thing was Jade Goody and the documentaries on her. It really stuck in my brain so as soon as I got asked to attend I went.

“There are a lot of online influencers who are positive about going for screening so it wasn’t a bother for me. When I went again this year I was waiting at the doctors for longer than the procedure – it’s one of the quickest things in the world.”

Following her initial cervical screening in 2020 Alice awaited her results, not worried that the results may be bad news.

“The day my letter came we were in lockdown and I had been having a bad few days. I was in a bad mood that day and before I opened it and I said ‘I’ve probably got cancer’.

“The letter said they found abnormal cells and I remember that day being horrific, I cried and cried. You don’t hear much about the after bit, just the importance of screening. I Googled it and had a major panic about it all, I hadn’t researched the possibility of a positive beforehand so was off guard.”

As the country continued under national Covid-19 restrictions, Alice had to wait until January for appointments to investigate further – meaning an anxious Christmas Alice and her family.

“Mum was trying to keep it together at home and her and my boyfriend were both thinking they needed to be fine for me, but it was stressful for them both. It was a horrible wait over Christmas, it was three months between my screening and colposcopy.

“I was a bit scared for the colposcopy at Warwick Hospital as I had to go in alone, but the nurses were lovely and made me feel really comfortable. The nurse explained what would happen and following the procedure told me there was no cancer or biopsy needed.

“When I came out and got in the car my boyfriend looked at me and asked how it went but I showed no reaction initially, I was thinking ‘what if they made a mistake’. what if etc. It was about ten minutes later that I started crying from a delayed reaction, if someone was with me I think it would have been instant.

“My post-screening experience was a scary one, but I’m so glad I went for the check. It’s a bad analogy but if a warning light comes on in your car you need to get it checked and fixed, otherwise your car could break down. If you are asked to go for cervical screening, please go.”

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