

The stages of cancer of the vagina

Useful information for cancer patients

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You can view this information in a larger print on our website.

What staging is

The stage of a cancer describes how big it is and whether it has spread. It is important because doctors often decide treatment according to stage. The tests and scans that you have had will give your doctor some information about the stage of your cancer. But your doctor may not be able to tell you the exact stage until after you have had surgery.

Different staging systems

There are different ways of staging vaginal cancers. Most gynaecologists prefer to use the FIGO system, developed by the International Federation of Gynaecology and Obstetrics. There are 4 stages – from stage 1 (the earliest stage) to stage 4 (the most advanced stage).

Sometimes staging can sound a bit confusing. If you don't understand what stage your cancer is and would like to know more, you can ask your doctor or specialist nurse to explain. It may help you understand why your doctor recommends a particular treatment for you.

Vaginal intraepithelial neoplasia grade 3 (VAIN 3)

This is not vaginal cancer, but could turn into a cancer. Some doctors call it precancer although many women with VAIN will not develop cancer. It used to also be known as stage 0 vaginal cancer, but now it is known as vaginal intraepithelial neoplasia grade 3 (VAIN 3) or carcinoma in situ (CIS). There are abnormal cells in the inner lining of the vagina but they are only in the lining. The cells have not spread away from where they started or begun to grow into the deeper tissues of the vagina.

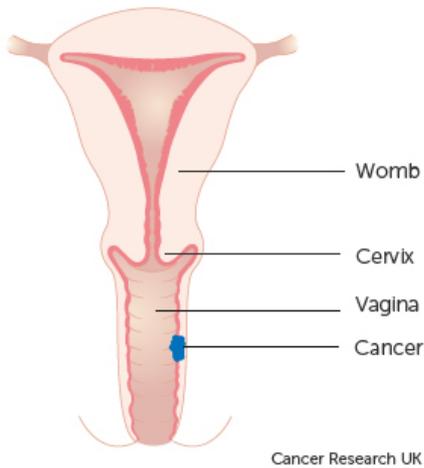
VAIN can be classified as VAIN 1, 2 or 3. VAIN 1 means the abnormal cells are in one third of the thickness of the lining of the vagina. VAIN 3 means the full thickness of the lining of the vagina has abnormal cells. VAIN is a precancerous condition. If it is detected and you have treatment, this can prevent vaginal cancer from developing.

The stages of vaginal cancer

The FIGO system has 4 staging groups for vaginal cancer. These are

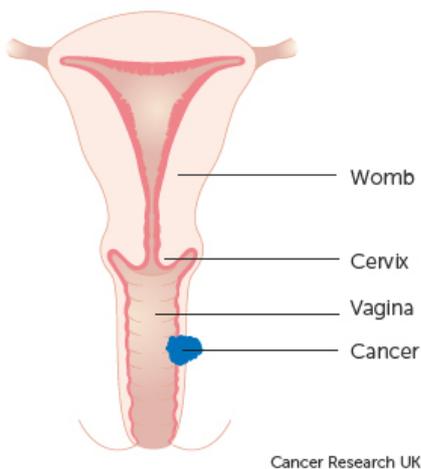
Stage 1

In this stage the cancer has started to grow into the wall of the vagina but has not spread further.



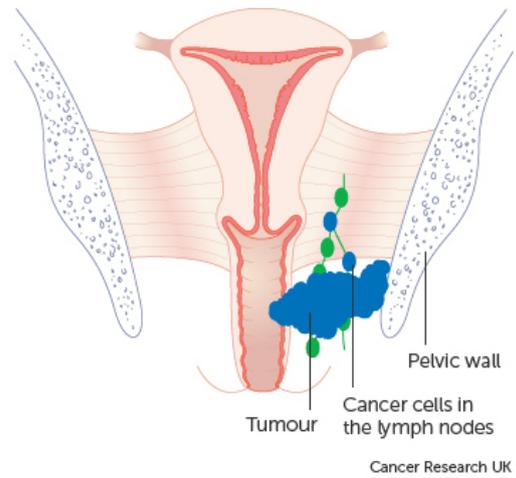
Stage 2

In this stage, the cancer has begun to spread outside the vagina into the surrounding tissues. But it has not reached the walls of the pelvis.



Stage 3

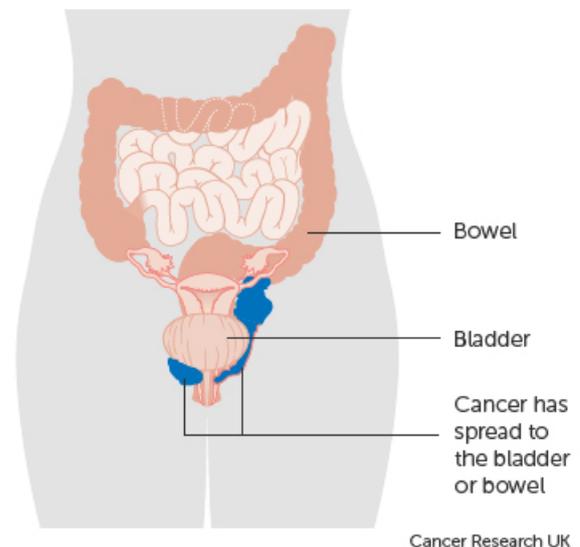
This stage means that the cancer has spread outside the vagina and reached the side walls of the pelvis. There may also be cancer cells in lymph nodes close to the vagina.



Stage 4

This stage is advanced vaginal cancer. The cancer has spread to other body organs outside the vagina.

If the cancer has spread to your bladder or back passage (rectum), this is called stage 4A. Only about 1 in 10 women (10%) with vaginal cancer have this stage when the cancer is diagnosed.

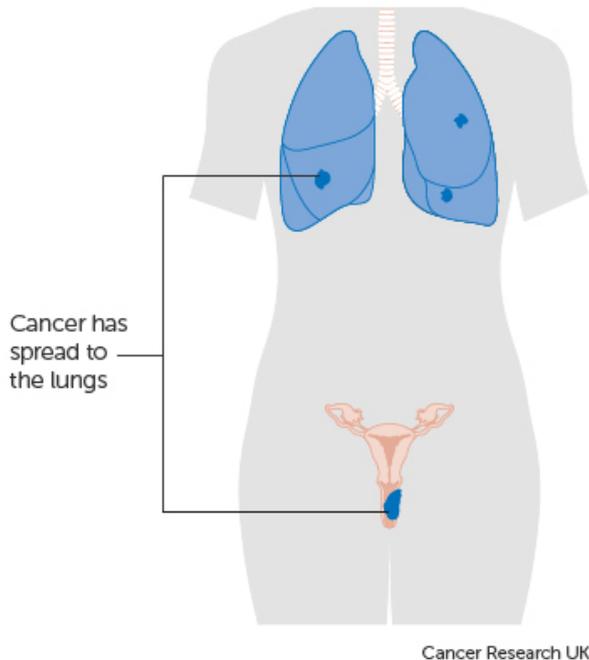


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If the cancer has spread to organs further away, such as the lungs, this is called stage 4B.

If vaginal cancer comes back

This is called recurrent disease. It means that the cancer has come back (recurred) after previous treatment. If vaginal cancer is going to come back it is most likely to do so within 2 years of first being treated.



For more information, visit our website <http://www.cruk.org/about-cancer>

You will find a wide range of detailed, up to date information for people affected by cancer, including a clinical trials database that you can search for trials in the UK. Our information is based on the best current scientific evidence and reviewed regularly by leading clinicians and experts in health and social care.

For answers to your questions about cancer call our Cancer Information Nurses on 0808 800 4040 9am till 5pm Monday to Friday.

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