



The athlete's health scare led her to raise awareness of cervical cancer.

THESE SIMPLE TESTS COULD save your life

Jana Pittman reveals the lifesaving steps you can take in the fight against cervical cancer

When athletics world champion Jana Pittman found out she had cervical cell abnormalities, it came as a shock. While she didn't require any treatment, the pregnant mum-of-two – who is now studying medicine – wanted to help make a change for others so decided to become an ambassador for the Australian Cervical Cancer Foundation (ACCF).

'I have been passionate about women's health for many years and in particular raising awareness and reducing the rates of cervical cancer,' she says.

'When I found out I had cervical dysplasia [when healthy cells in the cervix become abnormal, which can lead to cervical cancer], it was scary, but I was incredibly well cared for,' she says.

According to Dr Ginni Mansburg, cervical cancer is almost entirely preventable.

'If you are fully vaccinated and have your cervical screening tests done regularly, then your chances of dying from cervical cancer are very slim,' she says.

However, almost 50 per cent of Australian women aren't

being screened as regularly as they should. It's recommended that sexually active women get a Pap test every two years from the age of 18.

In 2006, the Gardasil vaccine was introduced for all 12-to-13-year-old girls and boys. Cervical cancer is caused by the human papilloma virus (HPV) and this vaccine protects against 70 to 80 per cent of the cancer-causing HPV types.

Dr Mansburg says it's because of this vaccine, plus new research into cervical screening, that from 2017 women will now be tested for HPV rather than for abnormal cells, which is what the Pap test currently looks for.

'By identifying if women have HPV or not and then treating accordingly, indication of cervical cancer should be detected early,' she says.

And Jana is helping to spread the word.

'With the great screening and prevention programs here in Australia, we can make a huge impact on the disease, simply by empowering women with knowledge,' she says.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Download the free Cervical Health App.
- Book your Cervical Cancer screening, if you are overdue. You can sign up to receive a 'Get the Pap text' with the Australian Cervical Cancer Foundation via its website. This is a free SMS service that sends out a reminder text every two years.
- Donate throughout National Cervical Cancer Awareness Week to support those living with cervical cancer.

National Cervical Cancer Awareness Week takes place from November 7-13, 2016. Visit accf.org.au for details.