



A professor at Queen Mary, University of London has developed a less expensive screening test for the virus that causes cervical cancer, an innovative that could save the lives of hundreds of thousands of women who do not have access to standard smear tests.

Traditional screening, which has greatly reduced the incidence of cervical cancer in developed nations, is costly and relies on good medical facilities. In developing countries, where such programmes are unaffordable, the disease still causes numerous deaths.

But Attila Lorincz, professor of molecular epidemiology at Queen Mary, created a test for the cancer-causing human papilloma virus that can be carried out at home and assessed automatically.

A randomized clinical trial in rural Mexico involved more than 20,000 women. Compared with those invited to a clinic for a smear test, there was greater uptake for the new test, and it detected more than four times as many cases of cervical cancer.

The trial, supported by the country's health ministry and the pharmaceutical firm Qiagen, also detected more than three times as many cases of a pre-cancerous condition. The test may also be useful for 700,000 UK women who do not take up the offer of a smear test.

Shearer West, head of the University of Oxford's Humanities Division and one of the judges, said: "Professor Lorincz's work has been widely recognised for its potential to ensure early identification of cervical cancer and thereby to reduce preventable death."