



Cervical Cancer 2009 Fact Sheet

Introduction

Cervical cancer used to be one of the most common causes of cancer death in women in the United States. Today, cervical cancer is one of the most preventable cancers. Lives are saved because more women are routinely screened with a Pap test (also called a Pap smear). In 2009, an estimated 11,270 women will be diagnosed with cervical cancer and an estimated 4,070 will die from the disease.

At Risk

- Women who are infected with the human papillomavirus (HPV), a sexually transmitted virus
- Women who become sexually active at an early age
- Women who have many sex partners
- Women who don't have regular Pap tests
- Women who smoke
- Women who have used birth control pills for a long time
- Women with weakened immune systems

Risk Reduction and Early Detection

- Avoid infection with HPV by not having sex or by using condoms the right way every time if you have sex. (However, condoms cannot give complete protection against HPV because it can infect areas that are not covered by a condom.) Avoiding HPV is the most important way to reduce your risk of cervical cancer.
- Don't smoke, and don't breathe in second-hand smoke.
- Begin regular screening for cervical cancer within three years after becoming sexually active but no later than age 21. Get screened every year with the standard Pap test, or every two years with the newer liquid-based Pap test. (A Pap test is not the only reason to visit your health care professional. A yearly check-up is a good idea to ensure your health.)
- At age 30, consider adding an HPV test to the Pap test for your regular screening. After three normal Pap tests and a negative HPV test, a woman may get screened every three years with a Pap test and an HPV test. However, if she has been exposed to diethylstilbestrol (DES) before birth, is infected with HIV or has a weakened immune system, she should continue to have a yearly screening.
- Consider getting the HPV vaccine. Public health recommendations include the HPV vaccine for girls age 11 and 12 and also for young women age 13–26 if not yet vaccinated. Girls and young women should talk with their health care professionals about being vaccinated. The vaccine is most effective if given before a person has become sexually active.
- If you have had a total hysterectomy for reasons related to cancer, you should still continue regular screening. Screening is not necessary if you do not have a cervix as a result of a hysterectomy—surgical removal of the uterus and cervix—for a condition not related to cancer.

Symptoms

Precancerous conditions in the cervix usually cause no symptoms and are not detected unless a woman has a pelvic exam and Pap test. If a woman experiences any of the following symptoms, she should discuss them with her health care professional:

- Increased or unusual discharge from the vagina
- Blood spots or light bleeding at times other than during a normal period
- Menstrual bleeding that lasts longer and is heavier than usual
- Post-menopausal bleeding
- Bleeding or pain during or after sex

Treatment

- Cervical cancer is treated through surgery, radiation therapy and chemotherapy, alone or in combination. Treatment depends on the stage of the cancer, the type of tumor cells and a woman's medical condition.