

JANUARY IS CERVICAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

LEARN ABOUT HPV AND CERVICAL CANCER PREVENTION

WHAT IS HPV?

HPV is human papillomavirus. HPV is a common virus—more than half of sexually active men and women are infected with HPV at some time. At any time there are approximately 79 million people in the U.S. with HPV.

Some types of HPV may cause symptoms like genital warts. Other types cause cervical lesions which, over a period of time, can develop into cancer if undetected. However, most people have no symptoms of HPV infection, which means they have no idea they have HPV. In most cases, HPV is harmless and the body clears most HPV infections naturally.

HPV AND CERVICAL CANCER

According to the National Cancer Institute, more than 12,000 women in the U.S. will be diagnosed cervical cancer this year and about 4,000 of these women will die. Most women with an HPV infection will not develop cervical cancer, but it's very important to have regular screening tests, including Pap and HPV tests as recommended.

Cervical cancer is preventable if precancerous cell changes are detected and treated early, before cervical cancer develops. Cervical cancer usually takes years to progress. This is why getting screened on a regular basis is important; screening can usually catch any potential problems before they progress.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PAP AND HPV TESTS?

A Pap test is a test to find abnormal cell changes on the cervix (cervical dysplasia) before they have a chance to turn into cancer. A small brush or cotton tipped applicator will be used to take a sample of cervical cells. These cells are examined for abnormal cell changes. Experts recommend that Pap tests begin no earlier than age 21.

Unlike Pap tests, which look for abnormal cervical cell changes, an HPV test can detect “high-risk” types of HPV. “High risk” types of HPV can lead to cervical cancer and this test helps healthcare providers know which women are at greatest risk. Experts recommend using both the HPV test and Pap test with women ages 30-65. (HPV tests can also be used with younger women who have unclear Pap test results.) For women with normal Pap/HPV test results, co-testing should be repeated once every five years.

KEY POINTS

- HPV is very common. Most sexually active individuals have HPV at some point.
- HPV infections are usually harmless and most are cleared naturally by the body in a year or two.
- With regular screening (Pap and HPV tests) cervical cell changes can be found, treated (if needed), and cancer prevented.



HPV VACCINES

Two HPV vaccines are currently on the market and both are approved for use with girls and young women. One vaccine is also approved for use with boys and young men. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends routine HPV vaccination for males and females ages 11-12, with “catch up” vaccination for those ages 13-26.

Being vaccinated against HPV makes it much less likely a woman will develop cervical cancer, or have precancerous cervical cell changes. HPV vaccines don't protect against all types of HPV, though, so women need to continue having Pap tests and, as appropriate, HPV tests even after being vaccinated for HPV.

TAKING CHARGE OF YOUR HEALTH

A majority of women diagnosed with cervical cancer either have never had a Pap test or did not have one in the previous five years. Cervical cancer is completely preventable if precancerous cell changes are detected and treated early, before cervical cancer develops. Regular Pap tests, supplemented by HPV testing, will detect virtually all pre-cancerous changes and cervical cancers.

LEARN MORE ABOUT HPV AND CERVICAL CANCER

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