

Cervical Cancer

WHAT IS CERVICAL CANCER?

Cervical cancer occurs when abnormal cells on the cervix grow out of control. The cervix is the lower, narrowed part of the uterus that connects the vagina to the upper part of the uterus.

WHAT'S ALL THIS TALK ABOUT SCREENING?

Cervical cancer can be found early and even prevented with routine screening tests. The Pap test is the main screening test for cervical cancer and pre-cancerous changes. It's especially important for women who have risk factors to get regular pap tests to detect cervical cancer early. More than half of the women in the United States who get cervical cancer have never had or rarely had a pap test. Regular screening tests can prevent cervical cancer.

WHO'S AT RISK?

Cervical cancer generally occurs in midlife. Most cases are found in women younger than 50, but rarely develops in women younger than 20. Many older women do not realize that the risk of developing cervical cancer is still present as they age. In the U.S. in 2016, an estimated 12,990 new cases of invasive cervical cancer will be diagnosed, and about 4,120 women will die from cervical cancer.

ARE THERE CERVICAL CANCER DISPARITIES?

Hispanic women are diagnosed at rates 65% higher than White women, followed by African-Americans at 45%, and other racial minorities. The highest death rate of cervical cancer is among African-American women, who were nearly three times as likely to die from cervical cancer compared to White women of the same age group. The primary reason for the disparity in cervical cancer is due to lack of screening, which is a direct result of unequal access to healthcare. Cervical cancer is one of the successfully treated cancers when found at an early stage, with a 92% 5-year survival rate. However, White women are more likely than African-American women to be diagnosed at early stages, due to greater rates of screening. Older Hispanic women have the lowest screening rates of any race group.



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WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS OF CERVICAL CANCER?

Several risk factors increase the chances of developing cervical cancer. Women without any of these risk factors rarely develop cervical cancer. However, many women with these risks do not develop this disease. The most important risk factor is being infected by the human papilloma virus (HPV). HPV is a group of 150 viruses, and can spread from skin-to-skin contact, including through sex. Nearly all cases of cervical cancers are caused by genital HPV. Unfortunately, infection with HPV is common, but in most people the body can clear the infection by itself. Sometimes, however, the infection does not go away and becomes chronic, which can eventually cause cervical cancer. There is currently no cure for HPV infection. Having a family history of cervical cancer can also double or triple the chances of developing cervical cancer.

HOW CAN I DECREASE MY RISK FOR CERVICAL CANCER?

Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable types of cancer. There are several behaviors that can reduce the risk of developing cervical cancer: getting pap tests regularly beginning at age 21, HPV tests, not smoking, using condoms during sex, and limiting the number of sexual partners. Delaying sex until you are older can also help avoid HPV because it reduces exposure to someone who has had many other partners. Cervical cancer is preventable with the HPV vaccine, with strong recommendations for pre-teen and young adult women.

Reference:

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Additional Risk Factors

- ✓ Smoking
- ✓ HIV infection
- ✓ History of Chlamydia infection
- ✓ Diets lacking sufficient fruits and vegetables
- ✓ Being overweight
- ✓ Long-term oral contraceptive use (5 or more years)
- ✓ Women who have had 3 or more full-term pregnancies
- ✓ Women under age 17 when they had their first full-term pregnancy



Morehouse School of Medicine Prevention Research Center, 720 Westview Drive, SW Atlanta, GA 30310 | Phone: 404-752-1022 Fax: 404-765-9771 | prcinfo@msm.edu | www.msm.edu/prc. The Morehouse School of Medicine Prevention Research Center is a member of the Prevention Research Centers Program, supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, under cooperative agreement # 5U48DP005042-02.



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