



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE
OFFICE OF HEALTH SERVICES

**EMPLOYEE HEALTH INITIATIVE:
CERVICAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH**

The United States Congress designated January as Cervical Health Awareness Month.

Cervical cancer is one of the most common cancers of the female reproductive organs. Most cases of cervical cancer are caused by infection with human papillomavirus (HPV). The cervix is the lower part of the uterus, the place where a baby grows during pregnancy. Cervical cancer is caused by several types of a virus called human papillomaviruses (HPV). The virus spreads through sexual contact. Most women's bodies are able to fight HPV infection. But sometimes the virus leads to cancer. You're at higher risk if you smoke, have many children, use birth control pills for a long time, or have HIV infection.

Cervical cancer may not cause any symptoms at first, but later, you may have pelvic pain or bleeding from the vagina. It usually takes several years for normal cells in the cervix to turn into cancer cells. Your health care provider can find abnormal cells by doing a Pap test - examining cells from the cervix under a microscope. By getting regular Pap tests and pelvic exams you can find and treat changing cells before they turn into cancer. A vaccine for girls and young women protects against the four types of HPV that cause most cervical cancers. [Cervical Cancer Vaccine Facts](#)

Before cancer of the cervix appears, the cells of the cervix go through precancerous changes known as dysplasia, in which abnormal cells begin to appear in the cervical tissue. An annual Pap test looks for changes in cervical cells that can lead to cervical cancer. Through increased use of the Pap test, the cervical cancer death rate has greatly declined. Chances of successfully treating cancer are highest when detected early. Click on the boxes below for more information.

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CERVICAL CANCER BASICS

- According to the American Cancer Society, about 11,150 new cases of invasive cervical cancer were expected to occur in the United States in 2007.
- Cervical cancer begins in the lining of the cervix when cells begin to change from normal to pre-cancer and then to cancer. This can take a number of years, although sometimes it happens more quickly.
- Cancer of the cervix is highly preventable. Regular Pap smears not only detect cancerous cells, but also abnormal changes in the cervix that can eventually progress to cancer over a period of 10 to 15 years.
- The five-year relative survival rate for the earliest stage of invasive cervical cancer is 92%, while the five-year survival rate for all stages combined is about 73%.

A Pap test and pelvic exam are important parts of a woman's routine health care because they can detect cancer or abnormalities that may lead to cancer of the cervix.

Why are a Pap test and pelvic exam important?

A Pap test and pelvic exam are important parts of a woman's routine health care because they can detect abnormalities that may lead to invasive cancer of the cervix. These abnormalities can be treated before cancer develops. Most invasive cancers of the cervix can be prevented if women have Pap tests regularly. Also, as with many types of cancer, cancer of the cervix is more likely to be treated successfully if it is detected early.

However, the American Cancer Society, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the US Preventive Services Task Force all agree that for women who have a hysterectomy for benign reasons (that is, they did not have cancer), and they no longer have a cervix (the cervix was removed with the uterus), Pap's smears may be discontinued. ACOG (the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologist) adds that a woman should have had no prior history of moderate or severe dysphasia. Speak to your health care provider about whether this is an appropriate option for you.

These three groups also state that women over 70, with an intact cervix, may discontinue having Pap's if they have had three consecutive normal Paps' and they have had no abnormal pap tests in the last 10 years.

Women should have a Pap test at least once every 3 years, beginning about 3 years after they begin to have sexual intercourse, but no later than age 21.

How often should a woman have a Pap test?

Women should talk with their clinician about when and how often they should have a Pap test. Current general guidelines recommend that women have a Pap test at least once every 3 years, beginning about 3 years after they begin to have sexual intercourse, but no later than age 21. Experts recommend waiting about 3 years after the start of sexual activity to avoid over



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treatment for common, temporary abnormal changes. It is safe to wait 3 years, because cervical cancer usually develops slowly. Cervical cancer is extremely rare in women under age 25.

Women ages 65 to 70 who have had at least three normal Pap tests and no abnormal Pap tests in the last 10 years may decide, after talking with their clinician, to stop having Pap tests. Women who have had a hysterectomy (surgery to remove the uterus and cervix) do not need to have a Pap test, unless the surgery was done as a treatment for precancerous or cancer.

If the Pap test shows abnormalities, further tests and/or treatment may be necessary.

What if Pap test results are abnormal?

If the Pap test shows an ambiguous or minor abnormality, the physician may repeat the test to determine whether further follow-up is needed. Many times, cell changes in the cervix go away without treatment. In some cases, doctors may prescribe estrogen cream for women who have and are near or past menopause. Because these cell changes are often caused by low hormone levels, applying an estrogen cream to the cervix for a few weeks can usually help to clarify the cause of the cell changes.

If the Pap test shows a finding of ASCH, LSIL, or HSIL, the physician may perform a colposcopy, biopsy, or endocervical curettage. If the lab finds abnormal cells that have a high chance of becoming cancer, further treatment is needed. Without treatment, these cells may turn into invasive cancer. Treatment options include the following:

- **LEEP (loop electrosurgical excision procedure)** is surgery that uses an electrical current that is passed through a thin wire loop to act as a knife.
- **Cryotherapy** destroys abnormal tissue by freezing it.
- **Laser therapy** is the use of a narrow beam of intense light to destroy or remove abnormal cells.
- **Conization** removes a cone-shaped piece of tissue using a knife, a laser, or the LEEP technique.

Human papillomavirus (HPV) infection is the primary risk factor for cervical cancer.

How are human papillomaviruses (HPVs) associated with the development of cervical cancer?

Human papillomaviruses (HPVs) are a group of more than 100 viruses. Some types of HPV cause the common warts that grow on hands and feet. Some HPVs are sexually transmitted and cause wart-like growths on the genitals, but these types do not lead to cancer. More than a dozen other sexually transmitted HPVs have been linked to cervical cancer.

HPV infection is the primary risk factor for cervical cancer. However, although HPV infection is very common, only a very small percentage of women with untreated HPV infections develop cervical cancer.

Click on the following link for [Cancer Treatment Information](#). This information represents the views of the doctors and nurses serving on the American Cancer Society's Cancer Information Database Editorial Board. These views are based on their interpretation of studies published in medical journals, as well as their own professional experience.

Personal Risk Check

Stack the Odds in Your Favor by Reducing Your Cancer Risk

Many people believe they have no control over their chances of developing cancer. In fact, up to two-thirds of all cancer cases may be preventable if we apply everything known about cancer prevention to our lives.

After you complete the [Personal Risk Check](#) you will have a better understanding of the role tobacco, diet and nutrition, physical activity, sun safety and self-care play in influencing your risk for cancer.

By completing this personal cancer risk profile, you are taking a major step toward a healthier lifestyle. This questionnaire will determine specific actions you can take to reduce your risks for developing cancer and/or to make sure that you identify the disease in the earliest, most treatable phase.

After answering the questions, you will receive your personal risk check profile, which outlines healthy behaviors and screening recommendations specific to you and your particular lifestyle.

Sources for this article: [MD Anderson Cancer Center](#); [National Cervical Cancer Coalition](#); [US National Institutes of Health](#); [National Cancer Institute](#); [MedLine Plus \(A Service of the National Library of Medicine and National Institute of Health\)](#); [American Cancer Society](#)