



# What you should know about **cervical cancer**

American Cancer Society Guidelines for  
the Early Detection of Cervical Cancer





# One of the best things you can do so you don't get cervical cancer is get regular testing for cervical cancer.

Changes in the cervix are often caused by a virus called human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV infections can lead to cervical cancer.

- The Pap and HPV DNA tests look for changes in the cervix that may lead to cancer.
- If you have cervical cancer, the Pap and HPV DNA tests can help find it early, when it's small and might be easier to treat.
- Your doctor or nurse can tell you how often you should get tested.

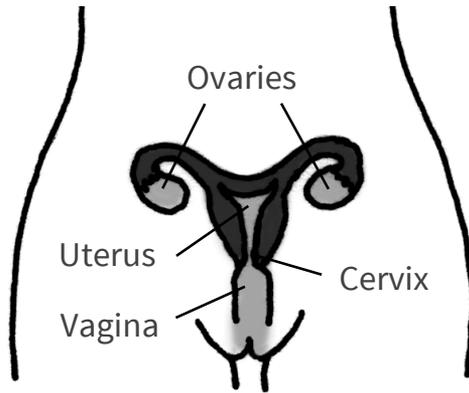


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*I take care of myself so I can take care of my family.*

# What is cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer starts in the cells of the cervix, the part of the uterus that opens to the vagina.



# What causes cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer is mainly caused by a virus called HPV.

HPV can cause changes in the cervix. HPV is **not** the same as HIV (the virus that causes AIDS).

Most types of HPV infections rarely cause cancer, but some types can cause cell changes that can turn into cancer.

There are routine HPV vaccinations for boys and girls **ages 9 to 12**.

# How does HPV lead to cervical cancer?

HPV is spread through skin-to-skin contact. The main way HPV is spread is through sexual contact, including vaginal, anal, or oral sex. It can cause an infection in the cervix. Most of the time, the infection doesn't last very long because your body is able to fight it. But in some people, it can last longer.

Long-term HPV infections with certain types of HPV can change cervix cells into precancer cells. Precancer cells are not cancer, and they don't cause symptoms. Most cells with early precancer changes go back to normal on their own. If they don't, they can be treated. Sometimes, if they aren't found and treated, the precancer cells can turn into cancer.

# Who can get cervical cancer?

Because HPV is common, any person with a cervix who has ever had any sexual contact with another person could get cervical cancer.

There is a greater chance of getting cervical cancer if you:

- Have HPV and it doesn't go away
- Have HIV or AIDS
- Smoke
- Have a family history of cervical cancer
- Became sexually active at a young age (especially younger than 18 years old)
- Have many sexual partners, or have one partner who is considered high risk

- Have a weakened immune system
- Have used oral contraceptives (birth control pills) for a long time
- Were exposed to the hormonal drug Diethylstilbestrol (DES) when your mother was pregnant with you

Talk to your doctor about your risk for cervical cancer.

## Who can get HPV?

Any man or woman who has ever had any sexual contact with another person can get HPV, even if they only had one partner. The virus is spread by skin-to-skin contact. Condoms may not completely protect you from HPV, but they can help keep you from getting other infections that can be spread through sexual activity.

## HPV Vaccination

HPV vaccination is recommended for both boys and girls between **ages 9 to 12**. Children and young adults **age 13 through 26** who have not been vaccinated, or who haven't gotten all their doses, should get the vaccine as soon as possible.

Vaccination given at the recommended ages, between ages 9 and 12, will help prevent more cancers than vaccination at older ages.

## Are there any symptoms of HPV?

No. Most people will never know they have or had HPV. But if the HPV doesn't go away on its own, it can cause changes in the

cervix cells. Talk to your doctor about HPV testing as part of your cervical cancer screening plan.

## How is HPV treated?

There's no treatment for HPV, but most HPV infections go away by themselves.

There are treatments for the cell changes in the cervix that HPV can cause. If regular testing shows cervix cell changes, your doctor or nurse will talk to you about treatments, if you need them.

## Understanding Tests for Cervical Cancer Screening

The tests for cervical cancer screening are the HPV test and the Pap test. These tests are done the same way.

- The HPV test looks for infection from types of HPV that can cause precancers and cancers of the cervix.
- The Pap test looks at the cells taken from the cervix to find changes that might be cancer or precancer.

### **Primary HPV Test**

A primary HPV test is an HPV test that is done by itself for screening. Certain tests are approved to be primary HPV tests.

### **Co-testing**

Co-testing is testing that combines an HPV test with a Pap test.

# American Cancer Society Guidelines for the Early Detection of Cervical Cancer

These guidelines are for people who have a cervix and are at average risk for cervical cancer.

## **Younger than 25 years**

Screening is not recommended. Cervical cancer is rare in this age group.

## **Ages 25 to 65 years**

Get a primary HPV test every 5 years (this is best). If you cannot get a primary HPV test, get a co-test (an HPV test with a Pap test) every 5 years or a Pap test every 3 years.

*Talk to your doctor about which test(s) might be available to you. The most important thing to remember is to get screened regularly, no matter which test you get.*

## **People older than 65 years**

Stop testing if you've had normal (or "negative") test results. Your most recent test should be within the past 3 to 5 years.

## **People who have had cervical precancer**

Get tested for at least 25 years after the cell changes were found and treated, even if testing continues past 65 years.

## **People whose cervix was removed by surgery**

Stop testing unless the surgery was done to treat cervical cancer or a serious precancer.

## **People who got the HPV vaccine**

Follow the same screening plan listed here.

# What do I do if I've had cervical cancer?

People who have had cervical cancer should talk with their doctor about the testing plan that's right for them.

People who have cervical cancer testing results that aren't normal may need to follow a different plan for a short time afterward.

# I'm done having children. Do I still need to be tested?

Yes.

# I've had a hysterectomy and still have my cervix. Do I need to be tested?

Yes.

# What will happen if I have a positive HPV or Pap test?

If the primary HPV test is positive, this could mean more follow-up visits, more tests to look for a precancer or cancer, and sometimes a procedure to treat any precancers that might be found.

If both the HPV test and the Pap test are positive (meaning you have cervix cell changes and you have HPV), then you will likely need more tests. Your next steps will depend on what changes are seen. Your doctor will talk to you about the testing that is best for you going forward.

## How to prepare for a Pap or HPV test

- Do not get your test done during your period.
- Do not have vaginal sex for 2 days before the test.
- Do not douche for 2 to 3 days before the test.
- Do not use tampons, birth control foams, jellies, or other creams or medicines in the vagina for 2 to 3 days before the test.

## Key points

- Most cervical cancers can be stopped before they happen. Finding cervix cell changes early with regular screening can help save your life.
- See a doctor or nurse, and get tested. Talk to your doctor or nurse about the Pap test and HPV test to find out what tests and testing plan are available to you.
- HPV is a virus that can cause cervical cancer and 5 other types of cancers.
- There are vaccines that help protect both young males and females from HPV infection.
- Most people who have had sexual contact will have HPV at some point, but very few will get cervical cancer.
- Most HPV infections go away on their own and don't cause cervix cell changes.
- HPV does not cause symptoms and cannot be treated. But the cell changes that HPV can cause in the cervix can be treated.
- HPV that doesn't go away over many years can lead to cervical cancer.

# Other resources on HPV and cervical cancer

## **American Cancer Society**

[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)  
1-800-227-2345

## **American Sexual Health Association**

<http://www.ashasexualhealth.org>  
919-361-8400

## **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**

[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) ([www.cdc.gov/hpv](http://www.cdc.gov/hpv))  
1-800-232-4636

## **Foundation for Women's Cancer**

[www.foundationforwomenscancer.org](http://www.foundationforwomenscancer.org)  
312-578-1439

## **National Cancer Institute**

[www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)  
1-800-422-6237



Here you can find answers to many of the questions you might have about cancer of the cervix and the HPV virus.

We also share the American Cancer Society Guidelines for the Early Detection of Cervical Cancer.

For cancer information, day-to-day help, and emotional support, call the American Cancer Society at **1-800-227-2345** or visit us online at **[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)**. We're here when you need us.



[cancer.org](http://cancer.org) | 1.800.227.2345



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No. 204700 Rev. 7/20  
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