



## Cervical Cancer Screening (CCS)

### History

Cervical cancer occurs when cells in the cervix become abnormal and grow out of control. The cervix is located at the lower end of the uterus, connecting the uterus to the vagina. As the disease advances, cancer cells can spread to other organs of the body.<sup>1</sup> All people with a cervix are at risk for developing cervical cancer, although it occurs most often in women over age 30.<sup>1</sup>

In the U.S., approximately 13,000 new cervical cancer cases are diagnosed each year. Hispanic women have the highest rates of developing cervical cancer, and Black women have the highest rates of death from the disease. Each year approximately 4,000 women in the U.S. die from cervical cancer.<sup>2</sup>

The main cause of cervical cancer is linked to long-lasting infection with certain types of human papilloma virus (HPV), a common virus passed through sex. HPV can cause precancerous cell changes resulting in cervical cancer. Most sexually active people will develop HPV in their lifetime, but the infection typically resolves on its own. In addition to having HPV, other factors that may increase the risk of developing cervical cancer include smoking, HIV or other conditions that compromise immune system, using birth control pills for five or more years, and having given birth to three or more children.<sup>1</sup>

The goal of cervical cancer screening is to identify pre-cancerous or cancer cells early, when it's more treatable and curable. Screening tests and the HPV vaccine can help prevent cervical cancer. When found early, it can be highly treatable and associated with long survival and good quality of life.<sup>3</sup>

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## Population

Assesses women who were screened for cervical cancer using any of the following criteria:

- Women ages 21 to 64 who had cervical cytology performed within the last three years.
- Women ages 30 to 64 who had cervical high-risk human papillomavirus (hrHPV) testing performed within the last five years.
- Women ages 30 to 64 who had cervical cytology/high-risk human papillomavirus (hrHPV) cotesting within the last five years.<sup>6</sup>

## Tips

Early detection and screening are your patient's best protection. Seeing patients regularly for a Pap and/or HPV test and encouraging them to get the HPV vaccine are effective ways to prevent cervical cancer.

## Provide Vaccine Education

Educate patients and parents on the importance and effectiveness of receiving the HPV vaccine to reduce chances of developing cervical cancer later in life. The HPV vaccine protects against the types of HPV that most often cause cervical cancers, as well as vaginal and vulvar cancers. HPV vaccination is recommended for preteens aged 11 to 12 but can be given as early as 9 years old. The vaccine is also recommended for people through age 26 if not yet vaccinated. It's important to talk to patients and parents about the benefits of the vaccine prior to exposure to HPV. The vaccine can prevent new HPV infections but doesn't treat existing infections or diseases.<sup>5</sup> Discuss with patients and parents the benefits and risks of vaccination.

## Promote Regular Screenings

Regular screening can detect changes in cervical cells before cancer occurs. Cervical cancer screening includes a Pap test, HPV test, or both.

- Educating patients on the importance of regular screenings and developing a follow-up plan can help the patient feel better about the screening process.
- Discuss with patients the different potential outcomes of the test and what may occur in the event of an abnormal result, including the need for additional testing or follow-up. Cervical cancer screening should begin at age 25, with those age 25-65 recommended to have a primary HPV test every five years.
- If primary HPV testing isn't available, screening may be done with either a co-test that combines an HPV test with a Papanicolaou (Pap) test every five years or a Pap test alone every three years.<sup>7</sup>

## Identify and Educate Patients with Increased Risk

Patients that may need additional or more frequent screening include those who test positive for HPV, women with history of cervical cancer, are infected with HIV, have a weakened immune system, or who were exposed to diethylstilbestrol (DES) before birth.<sup>4</sup> The American Cancer Society recommends those with a history of serious pre-cancer should continue to have testing for at least 25 years

after the condition was found, even if testing goes beyond age 65.<sup>7</sup>

- Identify patients with these risk factors and work together to develop a plan of care.
- Ensure patients understand their increased risks and encourage regular follow-up screenings as recommended by their provider.
- Screening tests can prevent most cervical cancers by treating abnormal cells before becoming cancerous. Most cervical cancers are found in women who have never had a Pap test or who have not had one recently.<sup>7</sup>

## Tips

**Review all the screening options with patients to determine which type of screening is best**

The American Cancer Society suggests the following screening tests for cancer and pre-cancer: primary HPV test, co-test and Pap test. The primary HPV test is better at preventing cervical cancers than a Pap test done alone and doesn't add more unnecessary tests, which can happen with a co-test. The most important thing to remember is to get screened regularly, no matter which test you get.

## The HPV Test

The most important risk factor for developing cervical cancer is infection with HPV. Doctors can test for the high-risk HPV types that are most likely to cause cervical cancer by looking for pieces of their DNA in cervical cells. The test can be done by itself (primary HPV test) or at the same time as a Pap test (called a co-test). There isn't a difference in your exam if you have both tests done.<sup>8</sup>

## A pelvic exam is not the same as a Pap test

Many people confuse pelvic exams with Pap tests. The pelvic exam is part of a woman's routine health care. During a pelvic exam, the doctor examines the reproductive organs, including the uterus and the ovaries, and may do tests for sexually transmitted diseases. Pelvic exams may help find other types of cancers and reproductive problems. A Pap test can be done during a pelvic exam, but sometimes a pelvic exam is done without a Pap test. A Pap test is needed to find early cervical cancer or pre-cancers so ask your doctor if you had a Pap test with your pelvic exam.<sup>9</sup>

## Five Ways to Boost Your HPV Vaccination Rates

The CDC recommends the following strategies to increase HPV vaccination rates:

- Bundle your recommendation for all adolescent vaccines, including HPV vaccine, in the same way, on the same day
- Communicate a consistent message with parents and patients about the vaccine
- Use every opportunity to vaccinate by checking patients' immunization status at every visit
- Provide personal examples of how you support vaccination
- Answer questions with terms patients understand.<sup>1</sup>

1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Inside Knowledge 2018 Cervical Cancer Fact Sheet. Accessed at [https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/pdf/cervical\\_facts.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/pdf/cervical_facts.pdf) on Aug. 16, 2022.

2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Cervical Cancer Statistics. Accessed at <https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/statistics/index.htm> on Aug. 16, 2022.

3 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Basic Information about Cervical Cancer. Accessed at [https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/basic\\_info/](https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/basic_info/) on Aug. 16, 2022.

4 American College of Obstetricians and Gynecology. Cervical Cancer Screening Frequently Asked Questions. Accessed at <https://www.acog.org/womens-health/faqs/cervical-cancer-screening> on Aug. 16, 2022.

5 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. What Can I Do to Reduce My Risk of Cervical Cancer? Accessed at [https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/basic\\_info/prevention.html](https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/basic_info/prevention.html) on Aug. 16, 2022.

6 National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA). Cervical Cancer Screening (CCS). Accessed at <https://www.ncqa.org/hedis/measures/cervical-cancer-screening/> on Aug. 12, 2022

7 American Cancer Society. The American Cancer Society Guidelines for the Prevention and Early Detection of Cervical Cancer. Accessed at <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/cervical-cancer/detection-diagnosis-staging/cervical-cancer-screening-guidelines.html> on Aug. 17, 2022.

8 American Cancer Society. The HPV Test. Accessed at <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/cervical-cancer/detection-diagnosis-staging/screening-tests/hpv-test.html> on Aug. 17, 2022.

9 American Cancer Society. The Pap (Papanicolaou) Test. Accessed at <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/cervical-cancer/detection-diagnosis-staging/screening-tests/pap-test.html> on Aug. 17, 2022.

10 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 5 Ways to Boost Your HPV Vaccination Rates. Accessed at <https://www.cdc.gov/hpv/hcp/boosting-vacc-rates.html> on Aug. 17, 2022.