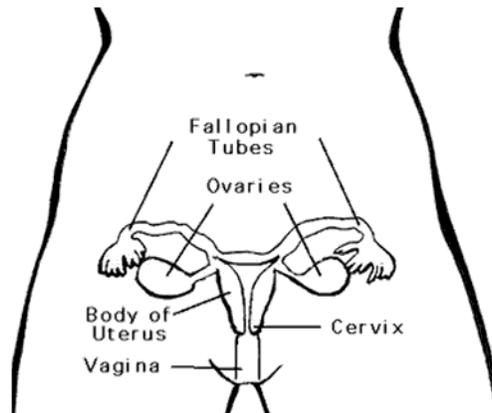


Cervical Cancer

What is Cervical Cancer?

Cervical cancer occurs when cells in the cervix become abnormal and divide without control or order, spreading to other parts of the body. A common cancer in women, it occurs in midlife, with half of women diagnosed between the ages of 35 and 55.



Risk Factors May Include:

- ✓ infection of HPV (human papillomavirus)/STDs (e.g. Chlamydia)
- ✓ family history of cervical cancer,
- ✓ DES (diethylstilbestrol) exposure before birth (a hormonal drug used by some pregnant women between 1940-1971),
- ✓ HIV infection,
- ✓ weakened immune system,
- ✓ early age of sexual activity, multiple sex partners,
- ✓ smoking,
- ✓ diet low in fruits and vegetables,
- ✓ obesity,
- ✓ use of oral contraceptives,
- ✓ multiple pregnancies

Symptoms May Include:

Usually no symptoms can be felt in the early stages, but later stages may include:

- ✓ abnormal vaginal bleeding following intercourse, douching, or after a pelvic exam,
- ✓ painful intercourse

Ways to Detect Cervical Cancer:

If all women had Pap tests regularly, most pre-cancerous conditions would be detected and treated before cancer fully develops. By having regular tests, most invasive cervical cancer that does occur would likely be found at an early, curable stage.

Pap tests

During the Pap test, the doctor or nurse uses a speculum to widen the vagina to examine the vagina and cervix and to collect a sample of cells from the upper vagina and cervix with a small brush, a cotton-tipped swab, or a flat wooden stick. The sample is checked for cancer or other abnormal cells.

A newer method called liquid-based Pap test can slightly improve detection of cancers, greatly improve detection of precancers, and reduce the number of tests that need to be repeated. This method is more expensive than a usual Pap smear and may not be offered under most health insurance plans.

Screening Guidelines

All women should begin cervical cancer screening about 3 years after they begin having vaginal intercourse, but no later than when they are 21 years old.

- Screenings should be done every year with the regular Pap test or every 2 years using the newer liquid-based Pap test.
- Beginning at age 30, women who have had 3 normal Pap test results in a row may get screened every 2-3 years with the regular or liquid-based Pap test. Women with certain risk factors should be tested yearly. Another option for women over 30 is to get screened every 3 years with either the regular test or liquid-based Pap test plus the HPV DNA test.
- For women 70 years of age or older who have had 3 or more normal Pap results in a row and no abnormal Pap test results in the last 10 years may choose to stop having cervical cancer screening (those at risk should continue their screenings as long as they are in good health).
- Women who have had a total hysterectomy (removal of uterus and cervix) can choose to stop cervical cancer screening, unless the surgery was done as a treatment for cervical cancer or precancer. Women who have had their uterus removed but not the cervix, should continue to follow the screening guidelines.
- To improve the accuracy of the Pap test, do not schedule it during your menstrual period. For 48 hours before the test, do not have sexual intercourse, do not douche, and do not use tampons, birth control foams, jellies or other vaginal creams or medications.

For more information, please contact:

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