

What women should know about

cervical cancer

and the human papilloma virus

American Cancer
Society Guidelines
for the Early
Detection of
Cervical Cancer



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

One of the best and proven steps that you can take to prevent cervical cancer is to get regular testing for cervical cancer.

Changes in the cervix are often caused by a virus called human papilloma (pap-ah-LO-mah) virus (HPV). HPV infections can lead to cervical cancer.

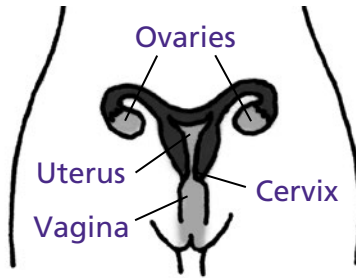
- The Pap test looks for changes in the cervix that might lead to cancer.
- If cancer does occur, the Pap test can find it early, when it's small and easier to treat.
- Your doctor or nurse can tell you how often you should have a Pap test.

This booklet has answers to many questions women may have about:

- Preventing cervical cancer or finding it early (called early detection)
- Pap tests
- HPV tests
- Human papilloma virus (HPV) – There are different types of HPV. This booklet is about the type of HPV that causes changes in the cervix, not the type that causes genital warts.

What is cervical cancer?

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



Do we know what causes cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer is caused by a virus called HPV.

What is HPV?

HPV is short for human papilloma virus. This virus can cause changes in the cervix. HPV is **not** the same as HIV.

HPV is not a new virus, but we are learning more about it. Most men and women who have ever had sex have had HPV at some time in their lives.



How does HPV lead to cervical cancer?

HPV is spread through sex, and it can cause an infection in the cervix. The infection usually doesn't last very long because your body is able to fight it. HPV infection can change cervix cells into pre-cancer cells. Pre-cancer cells are not cancer, and they don't cause changes that you would notice. Most cells with early pre-cancer 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 pre-cancer cells can turn into cancer. Cervical cancer can also be treated if it's found. **Very few HPV infections lead to cervical cancer.**

Who can get cervical cancer?

Because HPV is so common, any woman who has ever had sex can get cervical cancer. **But, most women who get HPV do not get cervical cancer.** Women who get their tests for cervical cancer as often as they should are least likely to get cervical cancer.

Some women have a greater chance of getting cervical cancer if they:

- Have HPV and it doesn't go away
- Have HIV or AIDS
- Smoke

Women who do not get tested, or who do not get tested as often as they should, have the greatest chance of getting cervical cancer.

Who can get HPV?

Any man or woman who has ever had sex can get HPV. The virus is spread by sex. Condoms do not completely protect you from HPV, but they are helpful in protecting you from other infections that can be spread through sex.



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. These changes usually show up on Pap tests.

How is HPV treated?

There's no treatment for the type of HPV that causes changes in cervix cells, but most HPV infections go away without treatment. There are no medicines to treat HPV.

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

Will a Pap test tell me if I have HPV?

A Pap test cannot tell you if you have or had HPV. But it will usually tell you if you have any cervix cell changes that could be caused by HPV. This is the most important information for you and your doctor to know.

No test is perfect: If a Pap test does not find cervix cell changes, then usually those changes will be found during the next Pap test. This is why it's important to get regular Pap tests.

What is the test for HPV? When and how is it done?

There is an HPV test that looks for the types most likely to cause cervical cancer. The test is done very similarly to a Pap test. For women who are age 30 or older, the HPV test can be done at the same time as the Pap test, with either the same swab or a second one. You may have had an HPV test at your last visit to the doctor or clinic and didn't know it.

American Cancer Society Guidelines for the Early Detection of Cervical Cancer

Ages 21 to 29 years

Get a Pap test every 3 years.

Ages 30 to 65 years

Get a Pap test and an HPV test every 5 years (this is the preferred testing) or get just a Pap test every 3 years.

If you are at high risk for cervical cancer, talk with your health care team so they can plan a testing schedule that's right for you.

Women over 65 years

Stop testing if you have had regular testing for the past 10 years and have not had any serious pre-cancers in the past 20 years.

Women who have had cervical pre-cancer

Get tested for at least 20 years after the cell changes were found and treated.

Women who had a hysterectomy and their cervix was removed

Stop testing unless the surgery was done to treat cervical cancer or pre-cancer.

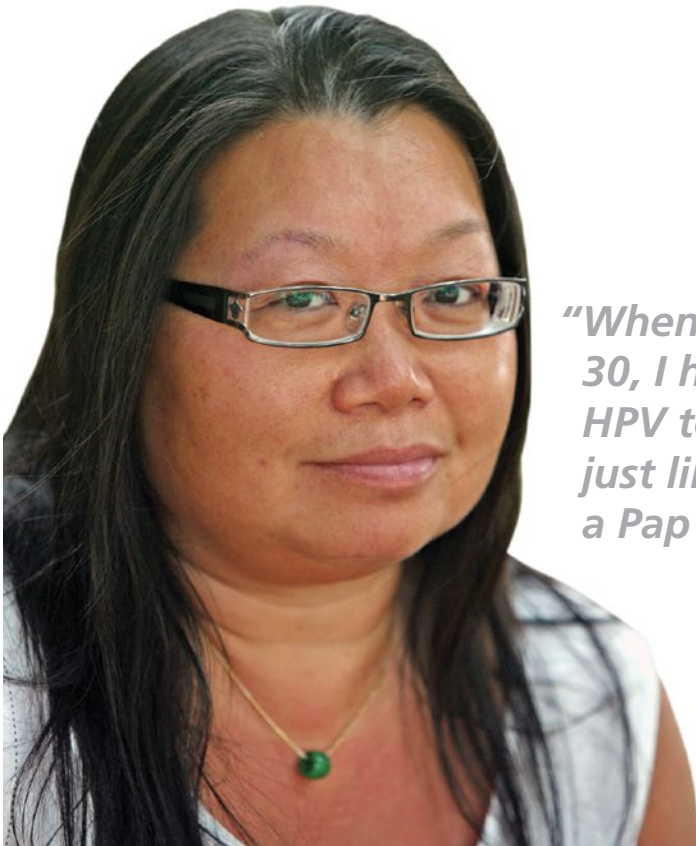
Women who got the HPV vaccine

Follow the same screening recommendations as above.

What do I do if I have had cervical cancer?

The American Cancer Society guidelines for early detection of cervical cancer do not apply to women who have been diagnosed with cervical cancer.

Women who have had cervical cancer should talk with their doctor about the testing schedule that is right for them. Women who have certain abnormal cervical cancer testing results may need to follow different recommendations for a short time afterward.



“When I turned 30, I had the HPV test. It was just like getting a Pap test.”



I've stopped having children. Do I need to continue testing?

Yes.

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

Yes.

What might put me at higher risk for cervical cancer?

You are at high risk for cervical cancer if you have a weak immune system (maybe from HIV infection, organ transplant, or using steroids for a long time) or because your mother took the drug DES while pregnant with you. If any of these apply, you may need to be tested more often. Ask your health care team what testing plan is best for you.

Why do women no longer need yearly testing? It seems odd not to be tested yearly.

The yearly Pap test dates back to the 1950s, before we knew that HPV causes almost all cervical cancers. Today, we know that HPV infections that do not go away can cause cervix cell changes, and those changes can lead to cervical cancer. When this happens, it occurs very slowly – usually over 10 to 20 years. So, today we know it is safe to wait longer between testing.

“That’s correct. You no longer need a Pap test every year, but you still need to have regular testing to find cervical cancer early.”



Most people believe that when it comes to medical tests, more is better. But more tests usually means having tests that are not needed and can cause people to worry, have complications from the tests, and have extra health care costs. In the case of cervical cancer screening, yearly Pap tests do not provide any added benefit to women when compared to testing every 3 years or testing every 5 years with both the Pap and HPV tests. Yearly Pap tests can lead to more unnecessary procedures, which can lead to worry, possible side effects from the procedures, and additional costs.

Even though you no longer need a yearly Pap test, you may still need to see your doctor or nurse yearly for other health reasons.

Why shouldn't women younger than 30 get an HPV test?

HPV is very common. As we have said, most people who have had sex have had HPV. Many young women (younger than 30) will have HPV. These infections are more likely to go away in younger women. These HPVs do not need to be detected because they will not cause any harm. If a young woman is tested and found to have HPV, then she's likely to have more tests and more appointments, which could cause her to be anxious and worry. Also, she will have tests for an HPV that would not have caused her any problems, and these tests could cause side effects that she would not want.

A young woman might need to have an HPV test, but not as part of cervical cancer testing. If a woman has an abnormal Pap test and has cervix cell changes, she may then have an HPV test as part of her follow-up. In this case, her age does not matter.

If I'm 30 or over, should I be tested for HPV when I get my Pap test?

The HPV test is safe. Having both the HPV and Pap test is now the preferred way to be tested starting at age 30. You might want to take this brochure with you and ask questions at the time of your next Pap test.

Why is a Pap and an HPV test better than just a Pap test?

The Pap test finds cervix cell changes that are already there. The HPV test finds the virus that causes the cell changes before the changes occur. It also leads to finding, or helping to find, some changes and cancers that are missed by the Pap test. This is because if a woman has 2 positive HPV tests, or 1 positive test followed by a positive genotyping test, she will be get more tests (such as a colposcopy and biopsy), even if her Pap test is negative. This helps find more cancers. And because of this added benefit, it allows women to get tested less often.



What will happen if I have a positive HPV test?

Do not be alarmed ... just make sure you get a second HPV test in one year. Your doctor might also suggest another option called a genotype test, which tells the doctor what HPV type you have.

One single positive HPV test is very common and about half the time the HPV goes away on its own. That is why you will not likely need any procedures or treatments. If the infection does not go away, it will progress very slowly. So waiting one year to repeat the test is safe.

A few types of HPV are faster growing than the others – and now there is a test for just those types. Women with a positive test can now get this second HPV (genotype) test. If the genotype test is



positive, you might then be referred for a test called a colposcopy. If the colposcopy is negative, you should get an HPV test again in one year.

If both the HPV test and the Pap test are positive (meaning you have cervix cell changes and you have HPV), then you will need more tests. The tests that will be done depend on the results of your Pap test. Pap tests are no longer just “positive.” There are a range of “positive” Pap test results that describe the amount and type of cervix cell changes. Your treatment will depend on what changes are seen.

Whether you have an HPV test or not, get your Pap test.

How to prepare for a Pap test

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



Remember

- Most cervical cancer can be prevented. Finding cervix cell changes early with a Pap test and getting HPV tests, too, can save your life. Today, cervical cancer is rare in women who get regular screening tests.
- See a doctor or nurse, and get tested. Talk to your doctor or nurse about the Pap test and HPV test to decide what tests and testing plan are right for you.
- HPV is a virus that can cause cervical cancer.
- Almost all women who have had sex will have HPV at some time, but very few women will get cervical cancer.
- Most HPV infections go away without causing cervix cell changes. HPV does not have any 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

1-800-227-2345

American Sexual Health Association

www.ashastd.org

919-361-8400

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

www.cdc.gov (www.cdc.gov/hpv)

1-800-232-4636

Foundation for Women's Cancer

www.foundationforwomenscancer.org

1-800-444-4441

National Cancer Institute

www.cancer.gov

1-800-422-6237



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