

Cervical Cancer

An estimated 12,360 new cases of invasive cervical cancer were diagnosed in the United States in 2014. Below are 4 ways to reduce your risk of cervical cancer.

Get an OB/GYN

An OB/GYN serves as a woman's primary care physician with expertise in both Obstetrics and Gynecology. OB/GYNs provide diagnosis and treatment of disorders and diseases of the female reproductive system, as well as manage pregnancy, labor and the time-period immediately following childbirth. These physicians provide women with preventative care, prenatal care, detection of sexually transmitted diseases, pap test screening and family planning. Routine gynecological exams are an essential part of a woman's total health and well-being. These important yearly exams allow the physician to detect problems, such as cervical cancer, in their early stages when they can be treated more easily.

Get the HPV Vaccine

HPV is short for Human Papillomavirus. In the United States each year, there are about 17,500 women and 9,300 men affected by HPV-related cancers. Many of these cancers (such as cervical cancer) could be prevented with vaccination. The CDC recommends the HPV vaccine for preteen boys and girls at age 11 or 12 so they are protected before ever being exposed to the virus. The HPV vaccine is given in 3 shots. The second shot is given 1 or 2 months after the first shot, then a third shot is given 6 months after the first shot.

If your teen hasn't gotten the vaccine yet, talk to their doctor about getting it for them as soon as possible.

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Get Pap Tests Regularly

Cervical cancer can almost always be prevented, and having regular Pap tests is the key. The Pap test looks for cancers and precancers in the cervix. Precancers are cell changes that might become cancer if they are not properly treated.

The US Department of Health recommends that most women ages 21 to 65 get Pap tests as part of routine health care. Even if you are not currently sexually active, you should still have a Pap test. Women who have gone through menopause and are younger than 65 still need regular Pap tests. Keeping recent guideline changes in mind, your OB/GYN will be able to give you a specific screening schedule that you should follow based on your age and medical history.

Get HPV Testing if Recommended

The HPV test checks for the virus that can cause precancerous cell changes on the cervix. It may be used to screen for cervical cancer, along with a Pap test, in women aged 30 years and older. HPV tests also may be used to provide more information when a Pap test has unclear results. Knowing whether you have a type of HPV that puts you at high risk of cervical cancer means that you and your doctor can better decide on the next steps in your health care. Those steps might include follow-up monitoring, further testing, or treatment of abnormal or precancerous cells. The HPV test is available only to women; no HPV test yet exists to detect the virus in men. However, men can be infected with HPV and pass the virus along to their partners.