



## A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

### *Take Time to Save Your Life*

*QuickStats: Percentage of Women Aged  $\geq 25$  Years Who Had a Papanicolaou (Pap) Smear Test During the Preceding Three Years, by Age Group and Education Level — National Health Interview Survey, United States, 2005*

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*[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.*

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Would you take a simple, routine test if you knew it could save your life? The Pap smear is the most successful test we have to prevent cervical cancer. Once the leading cause of death among women in the United States, cervical cancer cases have been steadily decreasing over the past 50 years, thanks in large part to early detection, as a result of the Pap smear. Over half of cervical cancers occur among women who have never had a Pap smear or have not had one in the past 5 years.

Dr. Mona Saraiya is a physician with CDC's Division of Cancer Prevention and Control. Dr. Saraiya is joining us today to discuss the importance of women receiving a Pap smear. Welcome to the show, Mona.

[Dr. Saraiya] Thank you, Bob.

[Dr. Gaynes] Mona, how common is cervical cancer among women in the United States?

[Dr. Saraiya] There are 12,000 new cases of cervical cancers a year and around 400 deaths that take place a year from cervical cancer.

[Dr. Gaynes] Does the Pap test only detect cervical cancer, or can it uncover other potential problems?

[Dr. Saraiya] The Pap test does detect cervical cancer, but it also detects abnormal cell changes of the cervix, which are called cervical precancers. The Pap test is not meant to screen for any other types of cancers.

[Dr. Gaynes] How reliable is the test?

[Dr. Saraiya] A Pap test is very reliable when it's done regularly and women follow-up any abnormal test results.

[Dr. Gaynes] What should our listeners know about getting a Pap smear?

[Dr. Saraiya] They should know that a female staff member will be present during the test, the nurse or doctor will take a sample of cells from the cervix, and then send them to a medical lab. And, at the most, they might experience some mild discomfort.

[Dr. Gaynes] How long does a Pap smear take?

[Dr. Saraiya] The actual Pap test only takes a few minutes, but the results will take longer — usually seven to ten days. The provider will let you know how best to get those test results.

[Dr. Gaynes] When should women begin getting a Pap smear, and how often should they get one?

[Dr. Saraiya] Women should begin getting a Pap test three years after they first had sexual intercourse or at age 21, whichever comes first. Women should be getting a Pap test regularly, and they should ask their doctor how often they should get one.

[Dr. Gaynes] Since cost is often an issue, do you have any suggestions on how women can get free or low-cost Pap smears?

[Dr. Saraiya] You may be able to get a free or low-cost Pap test through the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program by calling 1-800-CDC-INFO.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can listeners get more information about Pap smears?

[Dr. Saraiya] They can go to [www.cdc.gov/cancer](http://www.cdc.gov/cancer).

[Dr. Gaynes] Mona, thanks for sharing this information with our listeners today.

[Dr. Saraiya] Thank you.

[Dr. Gaynes] That's it for this week's show. Be sure and join us next week. Until then, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

*[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.*