

Cervical Cancer Fact Sheet

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SOURCES:

National Cancer Institute

- ❖ [Cervical cancer](#)
- ❖ [What you need to know about cervical cancer](#)

American Cancer Society

- ❖ [Cervical cancer](#)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

- ❖ [Cervical cancer](#)

What is cancer?

- ❖ Cancer occurs when cells in the body grow out of control.
- ❖ Cancers are named for the part of the body where they start.



What is cervical cancer?

- ❖ The cervix is the lower part of the womb (uterus).
- ❖ It is located at the top of the birth canal (vagina).
- ❖ When cancer starts on the cervix, it is called cervical (SER-vih-kul) cancer.
- ❖ Cells do not suddenly change into cancer.
- ❖ A “precancer” has cells that are not normal.
- ❖ It is not cancer but can turn into cancer if not treated.



What causes cervical cancer?

- ❖ Cervical cancer is caused by HPV, or human papillomavirus.
- ❖ HPV is a virus that is spread during sexual contact.
- ❖ Most adults have HPV infections at some time during their lives.
- ❖ Usually the infection clears up on its own.
- ❖ There are more than 100 different types of HPV. Only a few cause cancer if the infection is not caught early.
- ❖ A person who has a type of HPV that causes cancer and is not treated for many years could get cancer.
- ❖ A vaccine (shot) is available to prevent HPV infection.



What are the symptoms of cervical cancer?

- ❖ Symptoms may include:
 - Bleeding from the vagina when a woman doesn't expect it, such as between periods.
 - Heavy periods.
 - Pain during sex.
 - Discharge from vagina.



- ❖ Many things other than cancer can cause these symptoms. It's important to check with a health care provider about any concerns.
- ❖ Sometimes cervical cancer causes no symptoms and is found on a Pap test.
- ❖ The Pap test checks for cervical cancer.
 - It is often part of regular pelvic exam.



Are there tests for cervical cancer?

- ❖ Two tests are often done to check for cervical cancer or precancer.
 - Pap test—during a pelvic exam, the doctor or nurse takes a few cells from the cervix for testing.
 - HPV test—a blood test that checks for HPV.
- ❖ HPV infection can cause Pap tests that are not normal. The HPV test can help tell if an abnormal Pap test could be due to HPV infection.
- ❖ A woman should get her first Pap test at age 21.
- ❖ After the first test, she should have a Pap test every 1 to 3 years.
- ❖ Women who are 30 or older sometimes have an HPV test done along with the Pap test.



What if the results are not normal?

- ❖ When a Pap or HPV test is not normal, it usually does not mean the woman has cancer.
- ❖ The tests might not be normal because of:
 - Infection.
 - A precancer.
 - A lab error in looking at the cells from the Pap test.
- ❖ It is important to find and treat precancers.
- ❖ Treatment can stop precancer from becoming cancer.
- ❖ Infection can be treated with medication.
- ❖ The health care provider may suggest having the test again or getting other tests.
- ❖ Other tests can include:
 - Colposcopy—A health care provider uses a tool with a light and magnifying glass to look closely at the cervix for cells that are not normal. If there are abnormal cells, the health care provider will probably suggest a biopsy.
 - Biopsy— A health care provider takes a small piece of tissue from the cervix. The tissue is sent to a lab for study.





How is cervical cancer treated?

- ❖ Precancer is treated by taking out the cells that are not normal. Usually this involves a short procedure in the health care provider's office or the clinic.
- ❖ Cervical cancer is treated with surgery, radiation therapy, or chemotherapy. Sometimes more than one type of treatment is used.
- ❖ A gynecologist (doctor for women) or oncologist (cancer doctor) can help you choose the right treatment.

