

cervical cancer

protect yourself: know the facts

What is cervical cancer?

The cervix is part of a woman's reproductive system. It is the lower part of the uterus, or womb. Cervical cancer starts when cells that are not normal grow inside the cervix.

What causes cervical cancer?

- Having one of the human papilloma-viruses (HPV). This group of common viruses causes almost all cervical cancers. The viruses spread through sexual contact. Most women who have an HPV virus do not get cervical cancer. But having the virus increases your risk of getting cervical cancer.
- Having many sexual partners.
- Smoking cigarettes.
- Having many pregnancies.
- Using birth control pills for five years or longer.

What are the symptoms?

There usually are no symptoms of cervical cancer at first. When the cancer is more advanced, the most common symptom is abnormal bleeding from the vagina.

What is screening?

Screening means looking for signs of disease before symptoms appear. Health care providers look for signs of cervical cancer with a Pap test, also called a Pap smear. In this test, a health care provider removes some cells from the cervix. The test takes only a few seconds and is usually painless. The cells are checked in a lab for signs of cancer.

Why is screening important?

The Pap test can find cells that are not normal before they become cancer. It also can find cervical cancer early, when it is easiest to treat. Cervical cancer is almost 100 percent curable when found early.

When should women begin having Pap tests?

Women should begin having Pap tests when they reach age 21 or within three years of becoming sexually active (whichever comes first). Most women should have the test at least once every three years. Talk with your doctor about what is right for you.

What if I can't afford the test?

Medicare, Medicaid, and most private



health plans cover all or part of the cost of this test. If you don't have insurance, the Kentucky Women's Cancer Screening Program (KWCSPP) may help. For more information, call your local health department or the KWCSPP at **1-800-462-6122** and select "0."

How can I lower my chance of getting cervical cancer?

- Have regular Pap tests. This is the most important thing you can do.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Get plenty of exercise.
- Don't smoke.
- Limit alcohol to one glass a day or less.

Where can I get more information?

For information about cancer resources in your community, call the Kentucky Cancer Program at **(859) 219-0772**. For information on all types of cancer, call the National Cancer Institute's Cancer Information Service at **1-800-4-CANCER** or go to **www.cancer.gov**, or call the American Cancer Society at **1-800-ACS-2345** or go to **www.cancer.org**.

What is the HPV vaccine?

The HPV (human papillomaviruses) vaccine can help prevent the HPV virus and other changes that may lead to cervical cancer. It involves getting three shots over six months.

The vaccine is recommended for girls and women ages 9 to 26. It is not recommended for older women. Women who get the vaccine should continue having regular Pap tests.

Contact your doctor or local health department for more information.

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