

## Cervical Cancer and HPV Facts

### What is cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer is cancer of the cervix, the part of the uterus or womb that opens to the vagina. The American Cancer Society (ACS) estimates that in 2007, 11,150 women in the United States will develop cervical cancer and 3,670 will die from the disease. Worldwide, cervical cancer affects almost half a million women each year and nearly 275,000 women die from the disease.

### What causes cervical cancer?

The human papillomavirus (HPV) causes almost all cases of cervical cancer. It is a sexually transmitted virus that approximately 80 percent of adults will have at some point in their lives. However, an HPV infection does not lead to cervical cancer in most women because usually the cells in the cervix return to normal after the body's immune system fights off the HPV infection.

### Who is at risk for getting cervical cancer?

Women at highest risk for cervical cancer are those in whom a high-risk strain of HPV persists for years. Women who have not been screened regularly or ever put themselves at an additional increased risk of being diagnosed with the disease. Smoking and HIV infection can increase the risk that cervical cancer will develop.

### How is cervical cancer detected?

There are several cervical cancer screening options: the traditional Pap test (also known as the Pap smear), the liquid-based Pap test, and the HPV test. Both the Pap test and the liquid-based Pap test look for abnormal cells from a sample of cells in the cervix. The HPV test checks directly for high-risk strains of HPV.

Research has shown that combining the Pap test and HPV test is more accurate than the Pap test alone for identifying women with cervical cancer or its early signs. Women under 30, however, should not get the HPV test with the Pap test unless they receive abnormal Pap test results.

### How often should women be screened for cervical cancer?

The ACS and American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommend that:

- Women should be screened for cervical cancer approximately three years after they start having sexual intercourse but no later than age 21.
- Pap test screening should occur every year. Alternatively, the newer liquid-based Pap test can be used every year or two years. All women younger than 30 should get cervical cytology (cancer) screening at least every two years.
- Women age 30 and older who have had three normal Pap tests in a row do not need to get a Pap test every year. They can get tested every two or three years, unless they have certain risk factors, which they should discuss with their doctor. Another option is to get a combined Pap-HPV test every three years. Even with normal results, women should go to their doctor every year for a pelvic exam.
- Women age 70 and older who have had three or more normal Pap test results in a row and no abnormal test in the last 10 years can stop getting screened. ACOG recommends, however, that women over age 70 should still get a Pap test every two or three years. Women who have had a hysterectomy still may need to be screened regularly, depending upon what kind of hysterectomy they had.

### What is the HPV vaccine?

Gardasil® is a vaccine shown in clinical research to be 100 percent effective at preventing cervical cancer from certain high-risk strains of HPV (16 and 18), which together account for approximately 70 percent of all cervical cancers. The vaccine also targets the two HPV strains that cause approximately 90 percent of genital warts. Cervarix™, a second HPV vaccine, has been shown in clinical trials to be equally effective against HPV types 16 and 18 and is awaiting approval from the FDA.

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### **Who should receive the HPV vaccine?**

To be most effective, the HPV vaccine should be given before a woman becomes sexually active. The FDA approved the vaccine for girls and women aged 9 to 26. The federal Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommended that the vaccine be given routinely to females aged 11 to 12 and as early as age 9 and that women aged 13 to 26 should be vaccinated if they have not already received the HPV vaccine.

### **Is screening still be necessary with the HPV vaccine?**

HPV vaccines are part of a comprehensive strategy to eliminate cervical cancer. Screening using advanced and appropriate technologies, such as HPV testing, is still needed to target cervical cancers caused by HPV types not covered by the vaccine and for women who already have been exposed to HPV.