



Cervical cancer

What you need to know



Cervical cancer is a lot less common than it used to be.¹ That's because Pap tests — the tests used to screen for cancer of the cervix — help doctors find cervical cancer in the early stages, when it's easier to treat.

What is cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer is a tumor in the cervix. The cervix is the lower part of the uterus. It connects the vagina and the upper part of the uterus where a baby grows when a woman is pregnant.

Causes

Almost all cervical cancers are caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is a common virus that is passed from one person to the next during sex.¹

The most common risk factors include:^{2, 3}

- Smoking.
- Sexual activity at an early age.
- Many sexual partners.
- A weak immune system from HIV or another condition.
- Giving birth to three or more children.
- Using birth control pills for five years or more.
- A family history of cervical cancer.

Prevention and detection

Most women who develop cervical cancer are between 20 and 50 years old. To reduce your risk, you should consider:^{1, 2, 3}

- Getting the HPV vaccine (suggested between the ages of 9 and 26).
- Having a regular Pap test (or Pap smear) with HPV test.

Talk to your doctor about what screenings are right for you.



Sources

1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website: Basic Information About Cervical Cancer (accessed December 2018): cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/basic_info/index.htm.

2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website: Cervical Cancer (accessed December 2018): cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/pdf/cervical_facts.pdf.

3 American Cancer Society website: What Are the Risk Factors for Cervical Cancer (accessed December 2018): cancer.org/cancer/cervical-cancer/causes-risks-prevention/risk-factors.html.

4 American Cancer Society website: Signs and Symptoms of Cervical Cancer (accessed December 2018): [cancer.org/cervical-cancer/detection-diagnosis-staging/signs-symptoms.html](https://cancer.org/cancer/cervical-cancer/detection-diagnosis-staging/signs-symptoms.html).

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More facts about cervical cancer

Five more ways to prevent cervical cancer

In addition to getting the HPV vaccine and regular Pap tests, these five steps will help lower your risk.^{1,3}

- 1. Use condoms.** Cervical cancer rates are lower in women whose partners use condoms. But condoms don't prevent all HPV infections — a person can have HPV on areas of the genitals or anus that a condom doesn't cover.
- 2. Limit your number of partners.** Limiting your number of sex partners will make you less likely to be exposed to HPV.
- 3. Stay away from cigarettes.** Smoking makes you twice as likely to develop cervical cancer. If you smoke, talk to your doctor about quitting.
- 4. Consider using an IUD for birth control.** Being on birth control pills long-term raises your cervical cancer risk. Some studies show that women who have used an intrauterine device (IUD) for birth control are less likely to develop cervical and uterine cancer. Ask your doctor about the risks and benefits of using an IUD.
- 5. Stay at a healthy weight.** Being overweight increases your risk.

Know the symptoms

You may not have any symptoms in the early stages of cervical cancer. That's why regular screenings are important. However, in the later stages of the disease, you may experience:⁴

- Bleeding from the vagina after sex, between periods or after menopause.
- Pain during sex.
- Discharge from the vagina that isn't normal.

See your doctor right away if you experience any of these symptoms.

Protect yourself against cervical cancer.

Talk to your doctor about what screenings are right for you.

