

### Cervical Cancer

#### What is cervical cancer?

- The cervix is the lower part of your uterus (womb).
- Cancer of the cervix (cervical cancer) is a serious but preventable disease.
- Screening tests can find changes in cervical cells before cancer develops.
- Changes in cervical cells before cancer develops are called dysplasia (dis-PLAY-zha).
- Removing cells that have dysplasia can prevent cervical cancer.
- If left untreated, dysplasia can lead to cervical cancer.
- Screening tests can help prevent cervical cancer.
- Cervical cancer can be cured if it's found at an early stage.

#### What causes cervical cancer?

- Cervical cancer is caused by a virus called human papillomavirus (HPV).
- HPV is not the same as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV, which causes AIDS) or herpes simplex virus (HSV, which causes cold sores and genital herpes).
- Infection with HPV is very common among adults in the United States. In fact, most people will have HPV at some point in their lives.
- Usually, your body's immune system fights off the infection, and HPV goes away on its own.

### HPV

#### Is HPV infection serious?

- There are many types of HPV.
- The types that can lead to cervical cancer are called high-risk types.
- Other types, called low-risk types, may cause genital warts but do not cause cervical cancer.
- High-risk HPV is a problem only when it doesn't go away. If it stays in your body for a long time, it can lead to cervical cancer.

#### Are there symptoms of HPV?

- No, HPV infection doesn't cause symptoms, so most people don't know they have it.
- A person can have HPV for a very long time before it's found.

#### How does a person get HPV?

- HPV is spread from one person to another by skin-to-skin contact in the genital area.
- HPV can be spread even if there is no intercourse.
- HPV can be spread by vaginal, anal, and oral sex.

#### Are there any ways to avoid getting HPV?

Four things can reduce your risk for getting HPV:

- Get vaccinated. The HPV vaccine is safe and effective in preventing the majority of cervical cancers, and abnormal Paps. It can also prevent the majority of genital warts.

- Avoid sexual contact.
- Limit your sexual partners.
- Use condoms. Condoms don't fully protect from HPV, but they can lower the chance you'll get it. Condoms also help prevent HIV, herpes, and other sexually transmitted infections.

## Cervical Cancer Screening

### What screening tests are done for cervical cancer?

There are two main kinds of screening tests: the Pap test and the HPV test.

#### What is the Pap test?

- The Pap test is used to look for abnormal cervical cells.
- Pap tests are often done during the pelvic exam portion of a well-woman visit.
- During a Pap test, your health care provider will collect a sample of cervical cells for analysis by a laboratory.
- About 90% of Pap test results are normal.
- If the test result is abnormal, you may need more tests.
- In most cases an abnormal Pap result does not mean that a woman has cancer.

#### What is the HPV test?

- The HPV test is a very accurate way to tell if high-risk HPV is present in a woman's cervix.
- This test can use the same sample of cells taken for the Pap test or a separate sample taken right after the Pap.
- A positive test result means a woman has high-risk HPV. She should be followed closely to make sure the infection goes away and that she does not develop abnormal cells.
- A positive HPV test result does not mean that a woman has cancer.
- Also, a positive HPV test result is not a sign that you or your partner had sex outside the relationship. A person can have HPV for a long time before it's found.

#### When would an HPV test be done?

- The HPV test is used in two ways:
  - To see if a woman with a borderline Pap test result (one that shows unusual cells but not dysplasia) needs additional tests.

- To screen for cervical cancer, along with the Pap test, in women aged 30 or older. Women 30 or older who have HPV are more likely to have had it a long time. That means they have a greater risk of developing cervical cancer.
- Women in their 20s don't need an HPV test in addition to the Pap test. HPV infection is very common in this age group and usually goes away.

### When should women be screened for cervical cancer?

- Experts recommend that a woman's first Pap test be done by age 21 or three years after she becomes sexually active with vaginal intercourse—whichever is first.
- Women under age 30 should speak to their health care provider about how often to have a Pap test.
- Women age 30 or older can have an HPV test along with the Pap test. Women who have a normal Pap test result and a negative HPV test result should have both tests repeated in three years.
- Women age 70 or older should discuss with their health care provider whether or not to continue cervical cancer screening.
- Women who have had a total hysterectomy (surgery to remove the uterus and cervix) that was not performed to treat cancer or dysplasia don't need to be screened.

### How can I find out more about cervical cancer screening?

For help understanding the results of your screening tests, go to [www.arhp.org/PapResults](http://www.arhp.org/PapResults).

### Talking with Your Partner About HPV

Finding out you have HPV can be disturbing. It's important to make sure you have the facts about HPV to discuss with your partner:

- Most adults have HPV at some point in their lives.
- HPV doesn't cause symptoms and usually goes away on its own.
- Most people with HPV don't know they have it.
- Usually it is impossible to know which partner gave a person HPV.
- HPV is not a sign that you or your partner was unfaithful.
- It is not helpful or fair to blame your partner if you have HPV.