

## Resources

If you want to get tested, but do not have medical insurance call your local health department to make an appointment. There are also other local clinics and organizations that offer testing at low costs:

- ♥ Arlandria Clinic: 703 535 5568
- ♥ [www.Rachelswell.org](http://www.Rachelswell.org)
- ♥ National Women's Health Information Center: 1-800-994-9662
- ♥ National Cancer Institute, HPV Vaccines for Cervical Cancer: 1-800-422-6237
- ♥ Gynecologic Cancer Foundation: 1-800-444-4441
- ♥ National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program: 1-888-842-6355, option 7



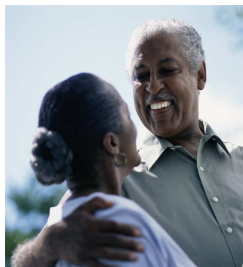
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Articles in this newsletter are not a substitute for the care and advice of medical professionals. When you have a question or need medical advice, diagnosis or treatment, consult your physician.

This newsletter is produced by Inova Health System in conjunction with your faith community. If you prefer not to receive this newsletter, please notify the appropriate personnel in your faith community.

Inova Health System is a not-for-profit health care system based in Northern Virginia that consists of hospitals and other health services including emergency and urgent care centers, home care, nursing homes, mental health, blood donor services, and wellness classes. Governed by a voluntary board of community members, Inova's mission is to improve the health of the diverse community we serve through excellence in patient care, education and research.



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November

2008

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# For Your Health

## Cervical Cancer: What Every Woman Needs to Know

### What is Cervical Cancer?

Cancer is a disease in which certain body cells do not function right, divide very fast and produce too much tissue that forms a tumor.

Cervical cancer is a cancer of the cervix, which is found in the lower, narrow part of the uterus. The uterus is the hollow, pear-shaped organ where a baby grows during a woman's pregnancy. The cervix forms a canal that opens into the vagina (birth canal), which leads outside of the body.

Cervical cancer used to be the leading cause of cancer death for women in the United States. However, in the past 40 years, the number of cases of cervical cancer and the number of deaths from cervical cancer have decreased significantly. This decline largely is the result of many women getting regular Pap tests, which can find cervical changes before it turns into cancer.

According to the U.S. Cancer Statistics: 2004 Incidence and Mortality report, 11,892 women in the U.S. were told that they had cervical cancer in 2004, and 3,850 women died from the disease

## Is Cervical Cancer Serious?

Your cervix is the lower part of your uterus (womb) and it connects the womb to the vagina (birth canal). Cervical cancer is a disease that can be serious.

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

## Am I at Risk for HPV?

HPV is a sexually transmitted infection. Your risk for cervical cancer increases if you started having sex at an early age, or if you and/or your partner have had sex with many other partners.

You are also at risk if you have sex with someone who is carrying the HPV virus that can cause cervical cancer. The virus can go away on its own but if not, it can lead to cell changes that can cause cancer.

## Can Cervical Cancer Be Prevented?

Yes, cervical cancer is a preventable disease. You should get regular screening tests and your health care provider can find and treat the changing cells before they turn into cancer.

Sometime between 11-26 years old, you may consider getting vaccinated against the HPV. Have a family discussion and ask your clinician whether your daughter could be a candidate for the HPV vaccine. It protects against the types of HPV that most often cause cervical, vaginal, and vulvar cancers. This vaccine is given in a series of three shots.

## What are the Signs and Symptoms?

The early stages of cervical cancer usually do not have any signs or symptoms. The late stages may cause an abnormal vaginal discharge of bleeding after sex or between periods.

There are two tests available to screen for cervical cancer:

1. The Pap test (or PAP smear) and pelvic exams
2. The HPV test



The Pap test looks for pre-cancer cells before it becomes cancer. The HPV test looks for the virus that can cause cervical cancer. If the tests find cell changes early enough, you can prevent cervical cancer from occurring.

## More Steps to Help Prevent HPV

- ♥ Don't smoke.
- ♥ Use condoms during sex. However HPV infection can occur in both male and female genital areas that are covered or protected by latex condoms, as well as in areas that are not covered.
- ♥ Limit your number of sexual partners.
- ♥ Have regular PAP tests.
- ♥ If you have had an abnormal PAP test, be sure to follow up with your doctor.

Note: You may be at greater risk of developing HPV if you have HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, or any other condition that weakens your immune system and makes it hard for your body to fight off infections