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Cervical Cancer Screening

The power of cervical cancer screening

Cervical cancer used to be the deadliest cancer among women in the United States.¹ But since 1975, the number of cases and the number of deaths have decreased each year.² So instead of ranking number 1, it now ranks 14th among all cancer deaths in women.³

This progress in the fight against cervical cancer has mainly been due to screening. However, many women still aren't getting screened regularly and it shows. In the United States:

- About half of all cervical cancers occur in women who were never screened.⁴
- About 10% of cervical cancers occur in women who were not screened within the past 5 years.⁴

So doctors and patients need to work together. This way we can be sure every woman gets screened according to the guidelines.

Cervical cancer screening guidelines

The guidelines recommend 2 tests for cervical cancer screening: a Pap test and a human papillomavirus (HPV) test. But both tests aren't used to screen all women. The test(s) used depend on a woman's age.

Age, years	Recommended Screening ⁴
<21	No screening
21 to 29	Pap test every 3 years
30 to 65	Pap test + HPV co-testing every 5 years (preferred) or Pap test every 3 years
>65	No screening (if low cancer risk)

Women younger than 21

Women younger than 21 years of age should not be screened. HPV infections are very common in women younger than 21. However, about 90% of these infections will go away on their own.⁶



Cervical cancer screening covered at 100%

The Affordable Care Act says that women's preventive healthcare services must be covered without copay.⁵ This includes:

- Cervical cancer screening
- An annual well-woman visit

The annual well-woman visit is important

An annual well-woman visit is an important part of good medical care. It's a chance to assess the patient's overall health. This can help uncover any health problems early on. It's also an excellent time for the patient to talk with her doctor about her health concerns. Services that can be included are:

- Height, weight, temperature, blood pressure check
- Physical exam (heart, lungs, breast, abdomen, pelvis, skin)
- Vaccinations (eg, annual flu shot)
- Screen for heart disease, diabetes, colon cancer, etc.
- Counseling about healthy lifestyle habits, sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy prevention, etc.

Facts

Women 21 to 29 years of age

The guidelines recommend a Pap test every 3 years for women 21 to 29 years of age. These women often still have HPV infections. But they also have a slightly higher chance of getting cervical cancer.

Women 30 to 65 years of age

The preferred screen for women 30 to 65 years of age is a Pap test *plus* an HPV test.⁴ This is called co-testing. Co-testing screens for both the virus that causes the cancer and the presence of abnormal cells. Co-testing is preferred to a Pap test alone because⁴:

- It detects precancer better than either test alone.
- It is better at detecting adenocarcinoma.
- It allows for less frequent screening.

The HPV screening test

The HPV screening test detects the types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer. These are called high-risk types. HPV screening tests do not detect low-risk types. Low-risk types are the ones that cause warts.

Most HPV screening assays test for a *pool* of high-risk types. They do not differentiate between the types. A positive test result means high-risk HPV is present. Exactly which of the high-risk types is present can't be determined from the screening test. An HPV genotype test is needed for that. Doctors use a genotype test to follow-up a Pap negative/HPV positive co-test.

Additional Information

You can find more information about Pap and HPV testing at QuestDiagnostics.com/testcenter/testguide.action

You can find more information about cervical cancer at these Web sites:

- American Cancer Society: cancer.org/cancer/cervicalcancer/
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/
- National Cancer Institute: cancer.gov/cancertopics/types/cervical

FDA approves new HPV vaccine

On December 10, 2014, the FDA announced that it approved a new HPV vaccine. This vaccine is called Gardasil® 9. It protects against 5 additional high-risk HPV types. Current vaccines protect against either 2 or 4 HPV types.

Gardasil 9 is approved for use in girls and women aged 9 through 26. It is also approved for boys aged 9 through 15. Gardasil 9 is administered as 3 separate shots. The first dose is followed by additional doses 2 and 6 months later.

References

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4. Massad LS, Einstein MH, Huh WK, et al. 2012 updated consensus guidelines for the management of abnormal cervical cancer screening tests and cancer precursors. *Obstet Gynecol.* 2013;12:829-846.
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