

January is Cervical Cancer Awareness Month

Over 13,000 women in the United States are diagnosed with cervical cancer each year, but the disease is often preventable with vaccination and appropriate screening.

According to the American Cancer Society (ACS), cervical cancer is most commonly diagnosed in women between the ages of 35 to 44; however, it is still possible to get later in life, with more than 15% of all cases occurring in women over age 65.

It starts in the lining of the cervix when normal cells gradually develop pre-cancerous changes that turn into cancer. These changes can be detected by the Pap test (Pap smear) and HPV (human papillomavirus) test and treated to prevent cancer from developing.

Treating all cervical pre-cancers can prevent almost all cervical cancers. Most invasive cervical cancers are found in women who have not had regular Pap tests.

The most important thing you can do to prevent cervical cancer is to get screened!

Screenings

There are two tests that help prevent cervical cancer, or find it early:

The Pap test (or Pap smear) looks for pre-cancers. It can identify cell changes on the cervix that may become cervical cancer if not treated appropriately.

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) tests looks for the virus that can cause these cell changes.

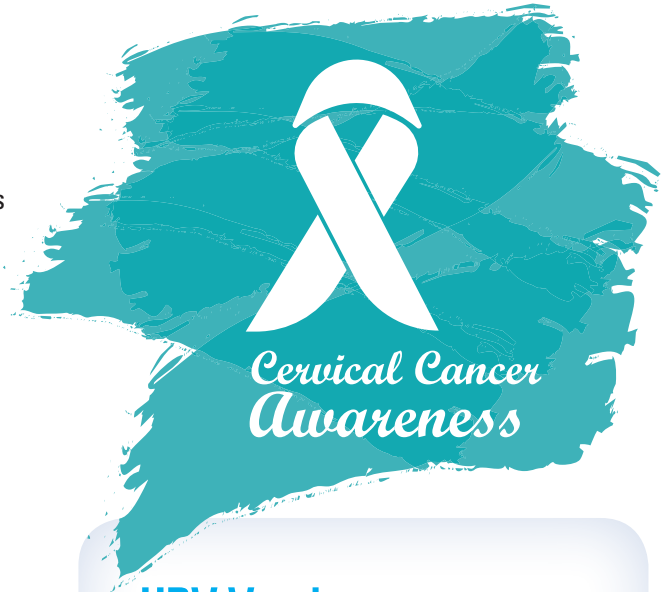
Screening Recommendations

The American Cancer Society recommends the following guidelines for the prevention and early detection of cervical cancer:

- All women should begin cervical cancer testing (screening) at age 21
- Women age 21-29 should have a Pap test every 3 years
- Beginning at age 30 through 65 women should have a Pap test combined with an HPV test every 5 years

Talk to your doctor about what screening schedule is best for you.

The County's health plans cover cervical cancer screenings under the preventive services benefit.



HPV Vaccine

According to the CDC, the HPV vaccine protects against the types of HPV that most often cause cervical cancer. Not only can HPV cause cervical cancer in women, but a variety of other cancers in both men and women.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends all boys and girls get two doses of the HPV vaccine at ages 11 or 12. The HPV vaccine can be started at age 9 to ensure children are protected long before they are ever exposed to the virus.

