

CERVICAL CANCER FACT SHEET

WHAT IS CERVICAL CANCER?

The cervix is the lower, narrow end of the uterus (the hollow, pear-shaped organ where a fetus grows). The cervix leads from the uterus to the vagina (birth canal).

Cervical cancer usually develops slowly over time. Before cancer appears in the cervix, the cells of the cervix go through changes known as dysplasia. Later, cancer cells start to grow and spread on the cervix and to surrounding areas.

SYMPTOMS OF CERVICAL CANCER

Early cervical cancer may not cause noticeable signs or symptoms, but it can be detected early with yearly check-ups, such as a Pap test to check for abnormal cells on the cervix. The prognosis (chance of recovery) is better when the cancer is found early.

Possible signs of cervical cancer include vaginal bleeding and pelvic pain, however, other conditions may cause the same symptoms. A doctor should be consulted if any of the following problems occur:

- Vaginal bleeding
- Unusual vaginal discharge
- Pelvic pain
- Pain during sexual intercourse

DETECTING CERVICAL CANCER

A Pap test is a simple test that allows a doctor to detect abnormal changes in the cells on the cervix. Cervical cancer screening using the Pap test can detect not only cancer, but also pre-cancerous lesions. Most deaths from cervical cancer could be avoided if women had regular checkups with a Pap test. Your health care provider may use any of the following tests to diagnose cervical cancer.

- Pap Test
- Pelvic Exam
- Colposcopy
- Biopsy
- Endocervical Curettage

TREATMENTS FOR CERVICAL CANCER

Patients are often treated for cervical cancer by a team of specialists. The doctors may decide to use a combination of treatment methods. Treatment options include surgery, radiation, chemotherapy, or biological therapy. To determine the best treatment consult with your health care provider.

CERVICAL CANCER RISKS

- Giving birth to many children
- Having many sexual partners
- Having first sexual intercourse at a young age

- Smoking cigarettes
- Oral contraceptive use ("the Pill")
- Weakened immune system
- Infection of the cervix with Human Papillomavirus (HPV)

SCREENING RECOMMENDATIONS

Women should begin regular screening for cervical cancer about 3 years after they become sexually active, but no later than 21 years of age.

Women who have had cervical dysplasia may need to have Pap smear tests more often.

After the age of 30, some women can have a Pap test every 2-3 years. It is recommended that you discuss this with your health care provider.