

Cervical Cancer



Cervical cancer starts in the cervix, due to uncontrolled growth of cells from the bottom of the uterus (womb) to the top of the vagina. Your risk can be reduced by screening and getting vaccinated against human papillomavirus (HPV) infection.

Cervical precancers

This happens when normal cells in the cervix gradually change abnormally. They are graded on a scale of 1 to 3, depending on how much cervical tissue looks abnormal.

- **CIN1** (mild dysplasia or low-grade SIL) - there is not much tissue that looks abnormal, and this is considered the least serious pre-cancer of the cervix.
- **CIN2 & CIN3** (moderate/severe dysplasia or high-grade SIL) - there is more tissue that looks abnormal; this is the most serious pre-cancer.

Although cervical cancer originates from cells with precancerous changes, if not treated in time, they could become cancer.

Risk factors

The main cause of cervical cancer is the presence of long-term infection with the human papillomavirus (HPV). It is estimated that at least half of sexually active people will acquire HPV at some point in their lives. HPV is a group of more than 150 related viruses.

Other risk factors include:

- Engaging in high-risk sexual behaviors.
- Smoking
- Having many full-term pregnancies.
- Having the first pregnancy at an early age.
- Prolonged use of oral contraceptives.
- Family history of cancer.

Symptoms

- Unusual vaginal discharge with some blood between periods or after menopause.
- Unusual vaginal bleeding after sexual intercourse.
- Vaginal discharge that doesn't stop, which may be pale, pink, brown, bloody, or have a bad smell.
- Pelvic pain or pain during sex.

Types of Tests

- The Pap test is used to identify pre-cancers.
- The HPV test identifies the virus.

Ideally, you should start getting both tests starting at age 21. If your results are normal, your doctor may tell you to wait 3 years for your next Pap test and 5 years for your HPV test. If you're over age 65 and your test results have been normal, or if you've had your uterus and cervix removed, your doctor may recommend that you stop getting tested.

Diagnosis:

If the results are abnormal or positive, your doctor will recommend the following tests:

- **Colposcopy:** This looks for signs of cancer in the tissues, using a lighted scope.
- **Biopsy:** A sample of tissue is removed from the cervix for laboratory analysis. This is taken during a colposcopy or cervical conization.
- **Computed tomography (CT scan)** or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI): These can show the location and size of the cancer.

Treatment:

- LEEP - uses electricity to remove abnormal tissue.
Cryotherapy - freeze abnormal cells.
- Laser therapy - uses light to burn off abnormal tissue.
- Hysterectomy - surgery to remove the uterus and, depending on the case, the fallopian tubes and ovaries.
- Radiation therapy - uses high-energy x-rays to kill cancer cells.
- Chemotherapy - is a medication given to kill cancer cells.
- Other options, such as targeted therapy or immunotherapy, may also be considered.



Prevention:

Regular screening is recommended so that this type of cancer can be treated early and has a higher chance of being cured. The development of abnormal cells over time will turn into cancer if it continues its course.

In addition to testing, the HPV vaccine protects against the types of viruses that cause cervical cancer. It is recommended for children between 11 and 12 years of age. However, vaccination can begin as early as age 9 and extend up to age 45.

Talk to your doctor about your risk for new HPV infections and the possible benefits of vaccination.



Social and Emotional Aspect

For tips, tools, and resources on how you and your family can cope with the emotional and physical concerns that arise during any medical treatment, visit your primary care physician or contact the following phone lines:

Medical Advice Line 1-844-347-7801

TTY/TDD 1-844-347-7804

APS Health 787-641-9133

References:

<https://www.cancer.gov/espanol/tipos/cuello-uterino/tratamiento>

<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/000893.htm>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/cervical-cancer/symptoms-causes/syc-20352501>

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