

About Cervical Cancer

Cervical cancer forms in tissues of the cervix (the organ connecting the uterus and vagina). It is usually a slow-growing cancer that may not have symptoms but can be found with regular Pap tests (a procedure in which cells are scraped from the cervix and looked at under a microscope). Cervical cancer is almost always caused by human papillomavirus (HPV) infection.

Estimated new cases and deaths from cervical cancer in the United States in 2017

New cases: 12,820

Deaths: 4,210

Cervical cancer represents .07% of all cancer deaths in the U.S.

Risk factors:

- **HPV Infection:** HPV is a group of viruses that can infect the cervix. An HPV infection that doesn't go away can cause cervical cancer in some women. HPV is the cause of nearly all cervical cancers
- **Lack of regular pap test:** Cervical cancer is more common among women who don't have regular Pap tests. The Pap test helps doctors find abnormal cells. Removing or killing the abnormal cells usually prevents cervical cancer
- **Smoking:** Among women who are infected with HPV, smoking cigarettes slightly increases the risk of cervical cancer.
- **Weakened immune system (the body's natural defense system):** Infection with HIV (the virus that causes AIDS) or taking drugs that suppress the immune system increases the risk of cervical cancer.
- **Sexual History:** Women who have had many sexual partners or who has sex with a man who has had several sexual partners are at a greater risk of HPV infection and developing cervical cancer.
- **Reproductive History:** Having a high number of full-term pregnancies (5 or more) increases the risk of cervical cancer.
- **Use of Oral Contraceptives:** Long-term use of oral contraceptives (5 years or more) increases the risk of cervical cancer.
- **DES (diethylstilbestrol):** DES may increase the risk of a rare form of cervical cancer in daughters exposed to this drug before birth. DES was given to some pregnant women in the United States between about 1940 and 1971. (It is no longer given to pregnant women.)

Preventative measures:

- **Screening:** Regular pelvic exams and Pap tests help find abnormal cells in the cervix before cancer develops
- **Preventing HPV infection:**
 - Avoiding sexual activity: HPV infection of the cervix is the most common cause of cervical cancer.
 - Using barrier protection or spermicidal gels: Some methods used to prevent sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) decrease the risk of HPV infection.
 - Getting an HPV Vaccine: An HPV vaccine has been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The HPV vaccine has been shown to prevent infection with the two types of HPV that cause most cervical cancers.