

Women's Wellness Focus: Cervical Cancer Screening

Cervical cancer affects 10,000 women annually in the USA. About 3,700 women die annually from the disease. Often times, cervical cancer symptoms mimic other ailments such as PMS or ovulation pains. For some women, cervical cancer has minimal or no symptoms. Therefore screening is critical and can save your life!

Be in the Know!

Cervical Cancer symptoms are below. They may or may not appear and may vary for each woman:

1. **Abnormal bleeding.** Can be heavy or light.
2. **Unusual or heavy discharge.** Can be thick, foul smelling, watery or contact mucus.
3. **Pelvic pain.** Pain in the pelvic region not related to your menstrual cycle could be related to cervical cancer. Can be mild or severe.
4. **Pain during urination.** Bladder pain during urination could be a sign that cervical cancer has spread to your bladder.
5. **Bleeding.** Bleeding between periods, after intercourse or after your pelvic exam

Reminders

Here are some reminder tips to help you take control of your health and prevent cervical cancer:

1. Be sure to schedule your annual OB and/ or GYN visit. Speak to your doctor about your health.
2. Have regular PAP (Papanicolaou) smear screenings as well as an annual GYN physical examination.(see new guidelines below) 60-80% of women newly diagnosed with cervical cancer had not had a PAP smear in the last 5 years.
3. If you have persistent HPV (Human Papilloma Virus) infections, be sure to have annual PAP smear screenings.
4. Follow-up with your doctor if you have abnormal smear PAP results.
5. Don't smoke.
6. Girls between the age of 11 and 12 can obtain the HPV vaccination which can prevent cervical, vaginal and vulvar cancer.
7. Use a condom with sex.
8. Limit your number of sexual partners.

New ACOG Guidelines

As of November 2009, ACOG (American Congress of Obstetrics and Gynecology) established new guidelines for Cervical Cancer Screenings:

- Every woman 21 years or older can begin to have regular PAP smear screenings.
- Between the ages of 21-29, women should have a PAP smear screening done every two years.
- Women 30 years of age or older may have PAP smear exams every 3 years as long as:
 - i. the woman has had three consecutive normal PAP smears
 - ii. the woman is not high risk (i.e. those who are HIV positive)
- Women 65 -70 years or older may cease PAP smear screening if there are three or more consecutive normal PAP smears.

www.cancer.about.com/od/cervicalcancer
www.acog.org/publications/patient_education/bp099.cfm

www.cdc.org