

Health Awareness

A County Health Pool Publication



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Cervical Cancer Awareness

Women tend to be more vigilant than men about getting recommended health check-ups and cancer screenings, according to studies and experts.

They are generally more willing to get potentially worrisome symptoms checked out.

But not always. Younger women, for instance, tend to ignore symptoms that could point to cancer. They have this notion that cancer is a problem of older people, and they're often right, but plenty of young people get cancer, too.

With that in mind, let's look at some cervical cancer basics.

Cervical Cancer Overview

Cervical cancer occurs when the cells of the cervix grow abnormally and invade other tissues



and organs of the body. When it is invasive, this cancer affects the deeper tissues of the cervix and may have spread to other parts of the body (metastasis), most notably the lungs, liver, bladder, vagina, and rectum.

However, cervical cancer is slow-growing, so its progression through precancerous changes provides opportunities for prevention, early detection, and treatment. Better means of detection have meant a decline in cervical cancer in the U.S. over the decades.

Most women diagnosed with precancerous changes in the cervix are in their 20s and 30s, but the average age of women when they are diagnosed with cervical cancer is the mid 50s.

Causes of Cervical Cancer

Cervical cancer begins with abnormal changes in the cervical tissue. The risk of developing these

abnormal changes is associated with infection with human papillomavirus (HPV). In addition, early sexual contact, multiple sexual partners, and taking oral contraceptives (birth control pills) increase the risk of cervical cancer, because they increase exposure to HPV. Cigarette smoking increases the growth rate of HPV.

Forms of HPV, a virus whose different types cause skin warts, genital warts, and other abnormal skin disorders, have been shown to lead to many of the changes in cervical cells that may eventually lead to cancer. Genetic material that comes from certain forms of HPV has been found in cervical tissues that show cancerous or precancerous changes.

In addition, women who have been diagnosed with HPV are more like-

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ly to develop a cervical cancer.

When to Seek Medical Care

The range of conditions that can cause vaginal bleeding are diverse and may not be related to cancer of the cervix. They vary based on your age, fertility, and medical history.

Vaginal bleeding after menopause is never normal. If you have gone through menopause and have vaginal bleeding, see your health care provider as soon as possible.

Very heavy bleeding during your

period or frequent bleeding between periods warrants evaluation by your health care provider.

Bleeding after intercourse, especially after vigorous sex, does occur in some women. If this occurs only occasionally, it is probably nothing to worry about. Evaluation by your health care provider is advisable, especially if the bleeding happens repeatedly.

If you have vaginal bleeding that is associated with weakness, feeling faint or light-headed, or actual fainting, go to a hospital emergency department for care.

The most important progress that

has been made in early detection of cervical cancer is widespread use of the papanicolaou test (pap smear) and high risk HPV testing. A pap smear is done as part of a regular exam. During the procedure, cells from the surface of the cervix are collected and examined for abnormalities. Diagnosis of cervical cancer requires that a sample of cervical tissue (called a biopsy) be taken and analyzed under a microscope.

As with all cancers, an early diagnosis of cervical cancer is key to successful treatment and cure. Please see your doctor.

WebMd.com

Benefits Corner

Reminder:

Other preventive care and screenings for women are also covered based on the guidelines from the Health Resources and Services Administration.

You may call Customer Service using the number on your ID card or your CHP Benefits Administrator for additional information about these services. (or view the federal government's websites, <http://www.health-care.gov/center/regulations/prevention.html>; or <http://www.ahrq.gov/clinic/uspstfix.htm>; <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/recs/acip/>.)

Covered services also include the following services required by state law:

- Routine screening mammogram;
- Routine cytologic screening (pap test);
- Routine prostate specific antigen (PSA) blood test and digital rectal;
- Colorectal cancer examination, including colonoscopies and related laboratory tests;
- Routine PKU tests for newborns;
- Cholesterol screening for lipid disorders;
- Tobacco use screening of adults and tobacco cessation interventions by your provider;
- Alcohol misuse screening and behavioral counseling interventions for adults by your provider.

Coverage for benefits in this section shall meet or exceed those required by applicable insurance law, which may change from time to time.