

DEDICATED EXPERIENCED SUPPORT

SHARE

sharecancersupport.org

Information for Everyone About Cervical Cancer



Welcome to SHARE!

SHARE is a national nonprofit that supports, educates, and empowers anyone who has been diagnosed with women's cancers, and provides outreach to the general public about signs and symptoms. We are a compassionate community of knowledgeable survivors, women living with cancer, and healthcare professionals. We are ready to listen to your concerns, respond to your questions, and provide education to help you make sense of your diagnosis and treatment.

SHARE is dedicated to serving women of all races, cultures, backgrounds, and identities. Because no one should have to face cervical cancer alone

SHARE is here for you and all of our services are free.

Understanding HPV and Cervical Cancer

Human papillomavirus (HPV) can cause several types of cancer, including cervical cancer. It is important to understand how this common sexually transmitted infection (STI) may lead to a cancer diagnosis.

Nearly all sexually active people are infected with HPV at some point during their lifetime. This is normal. Although about half of these infections are with high-risk HPV (meaning it can cause certain types of cancer), most infections do not lead to cancer because the immune system is usually able to fight them off.

Sometimes the immune system is unable to fight off an HPV infection. When a high-risk HPV infection is persistent (does not go away over time), it can lead to cell changes (dysplasia) that, if left untreated, may develop into cancer. It takes about 10-20 years (or longer) for HPV-infected cervical cells to develop into cancer.

Did You Know?

- Cervical cancer is highly preventable due to screening tests and the HPV vaccine.
- There are generally no symptoms of HPV.
- HPV is common in both men and women.

Screening and Prevention

When it comes to cervical cancer, the good news is that there are several steps you can take to prevent the onset of HPV or catch any abnormal cells before they have the chance to progress.

HPV Vaccine - The HPV vaccine protects against infection from nine HPV types, including the high-risk types that cause most HPV-related cancers, as well as those that cause the majority of genital warts. The vaccine is most effective when given between the ages of 9-12 (for both males and females), with eligibility up until 45 years of age. It is estimated that HPV vaccination can prevent up to 90% of HPV-related cancers.

Pap Test - The Pap test (or Pap smear) is most commonly used to screen for cervical cancer. The Pap test consists of collecting cells from the cervix by using a cotton swab or soft brush. These cells are then viewed under a microscope to determine whether they are normal or abnormal.

HPV Test - The HPV test is used to detect the presence of cervical infection with high-risk HPV types that can cause abnormal cells. Like the Pap test, it involves the collection of cells from the cervix. The results will come back as either positive or negative for HPV.

Screening Guidelines - Cervical cancer screening should begin at age 21, but the frequency and which tests you should have are dependent on your age and health history. It is important to consult with your healthcare provider about which test(s) are right for you.



Risk Factors for Cervical Cancer

HPV infection is the greatest risk factor for developing cervical cancer. Other risk factors include smoking cigarettes and having a weakened immune system.

Just because some of these risk factors may apply to you, does not mean you will get cervical cancer. It simply means you may be at a higher risk. The most important thing is to remain diligent with adhering to screening guidelines and to follow-up with your healthcare provider regarding any abnormal results or other concerns.



Cervical Cancer Signs and Symptoms

Although it is possible not to experience any symptoms, there are signs to be on the lookout for that could be an indication of cervical cancer.

Cervical cancer symptoms include:

- Abnormal bleeding- after intercourse, between periods
- Vaginal discharge
- Abnormal periods
- Back pain
- Losing weight without trying
- Fatigue
- Bone pain

Although these symptoms may be caused by factors other than cancer, it is important to be evaluated by a gynecologist. Listen to your body and know what is “normal” for you.



How To Be Your Own Best Advocate

- Stay up-to-date with cervical cancer screening (Pap test and/or HPV test).
- Determine if you're eligible for the HPV vaccine. Even if you've had HPV in the past, there is a benefit. It's not too late!
- Listen to your body and pay attention if something doesn't feel right.
- Knowledge is power! Know the symptoms of cervical cancer.
- If changes in your body occur that are not normal to you, or if symptoms persist, contact your gynecologist.
- Call SHARE to speak with someone who can provide information, guidance, and support.

If you've been recently diagnosed with cervical cancer, or if you're a survivor, we're here to help you.

Toll Free Cervical Cancer Helpline: 332.600.1057
sharecancersupport.org



Check out SHARE's Educational Programs & Support Groups

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165 W 46th St., Ste. 712 New York, NY 10036

sharecancersupport.org | latina.sharecancersupport.org