

Health Tips

Cervical Cancer Screening Can Save Women's Lives

(NAPSA)—Each year, more than eight out of every 100,000 women in the United States receive a diagnosis of cervical cancer. In 2010, about 12,000 women were diagnosed with cervical cancer and about 4,000 women died from it. This type of cancer is most common in women aged 35 to 55 and almost always develops as a result of infection with the human papillomavirus (HPV), which is passed from one person to another during sex.

The good news is that widespread use of cervical cancer screening has led to a dramatic decrease in cervical cancer deaths in the United States.

How Do You Screen For Cervical Cancer?

There are two tests used to screen for cervical cancer:

- Cytology:** This test, also called a Pap test or Pap smear, looks for abnormal changes in cells in the cervix. These changes may suggest that cancer may develop in the future.

- HPV test:** This test looks for the types of HPV that cause cervical cancer.

The main benefit of screening is that it can detect abnormal cells before they become cervical cancer. If cancer has developed, screening can find it early, when treatment works best.

Should You Be Screened?

When the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF), an independent group of national experts in prevention and evi-



Talk with your health care professional about cancer screening.

dence-based medicine, last examined the scientific research about cervical cancer screening, it issued several specific recommendations based on an assessment of the benefits and harms of screening:

- Women aged 21–65:** Screening with a Pap smear every three years.

- Women aged 30–65 who want to be screened less frequently:** Screening with a combination of a Pap smear and HPV testing every five years.

- Women younger than 21:** No screening; cervical cancer is rare in this age group and abnormal cells found during screening often return to normal over time, making follow-up treatment unnecessary and possibly harmful.

- Women older than 65 who have had adequate prior screening and are not at high risk for cervical cancer:** No screening recommended if:

- Three consecutive Pap tests have been normal, or two consecu-

tive HPV tests have been normal, and

- These results came during the 10-year period before stopping screening, and the most recent Pap or HPV test was within five years of stopping screening.

The Task Force also recommends against screening women who have had a hysterectomy with removal of the cervix and who do not have a history of cervical cancer or abnormal cervical cells that can become cancer.

Take Action

“About half of women diagnosed with cervical cancer have never had a Pap smear or have not been adequately screened,” said Wanda Nicholson, M.D., M.P.H., M.B.A., associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Medicine, and a member of the Task Force. “It is important for all women to be screened regularly for cervical cancer but I implore women who have never been screened or who have not been screened in the last five years to get care. Together, we can save thousands of lives every year.”

Talk with your doctor or nurse about your risk for cervical cancer and how often screening should fit into your ongoing health care, especially if you have never been screened for cervical cancer. If you do get a screening test, talk with your health care professional about the results of your test and the next steps you may need to take.