



Cervical Cancer: What Women Need To Know Ⓜ

(NAPSA)—While at any given time nearly 80 million Americans are thought to have been exposed to the human papillomavirus (HPV), you can protect yourself.

It's the most common sexually acquired infection in the United States. Most people who are sexually active have been exposed to it.

While HPV does not cause symptoms, the good news is that the virus usually clears on its own within two years of exposure. If the virus persists, however, certain types of HPV can lead to serious health conditions, including cervical cancer.

Screening Is Key

"No woman wants to hear the words 'you have cervical cancer' from her physician," said Ann T. Moriarty, M.D., FCAP, cytopathologist and adviser and immediate past chair of the College of American Pathologists (CAP) Cytopathology Resource Committee.

"Fortunately, excellent screening tests, such as the Pap test and the high-risk HPV test, have made cervical cancer one of the most preventable cancers. In fact, since the introduction of Pap screening programs in the U.S., the number of cervical cancer cases has decreased by 70 percent," added Dr. Moriarty.

Pathologists are physicians who confirm cervical cancer by examining cells under a microscope. Sometimes called the "doctor's doctor," pathologists work closely with the other physicians on the patient care team to provide an accurate diagnosis and to determine if further testing is needed if cervical cancer is detected. They also help guide treatment.

Making Sense of it All

With the HPV vaccine and the use of HPV testing, cervical cancer screening guidelines have changed. Here's what women need to know:

- Women who are sexually active should begin cervical cancer screening at age 21.

- Women between the ages of 21 and 29 should have a Pap test every three years.

- Women between the ages of 30 and 65 may have a Pap test and an HPV test (called a co-test) every five years if the test results are normal. Alternatively, these women may have a Pap test (without an HPV test) every three years.

- Women over age 65 who have had regular screenings with normal results need not be screened for cervical cancer. Women who have been diagnosed with cervical precancer should continue to be monitored and screened.

- The HPV vaccine is most effective when administered to children before they are sexually active (9–12 years). It protects both girls and boys. Parents should speak with their child's pediatrician to find out what is right for their daughter or son.

- To ensure accurate test results, ask your physician if your screening test will be performed by an accredited laboratory. The CAP accredits more than 7,500 laboratories worldwide, employing standards that exceed U.S. government regulations.

"Regular cervical cancer screening can save a woman's life," said Dr. Moriarty. "It's important for women to speak with their physicians about the timing and tests that are right for them."

Visit www.cap.org to learn more about the pathologist's role in your care.

To Reduce Your Risk of Cervical Cancer

- Have regular cervical cancer screening to detect precancer.

- Treat precancerous lesions to prevent cervical cancer.

- Vaccinate your child to prevent complications of HPV.