

What is Cervical Health Awareness Month?

Cervical Health Awareness Month is a chance to raise awareness about how women can protect themselves from HPV (human papillomavirus) and cervical cancer. HPV is a very common infection that spreads through sexual activity. It's also a major cause of cervical cancer. More than 12,000 women in the U.S. will be diagnosed with cervical cancer each year, and more than 4,000 of women will die.

Cervical cancer is highly preventable with regular screening tests and appropriate follow-up care. It also can be cured when found early and treated. Cervical cancer is almost always caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV). Vaccines are available to protect against the types of HPV that most often cause cervical cancer.

How can cervical cancer be prevented?

In most cases cervical cancer can be prevented through early detection and treatment of abnormal cell changes that occur in the cervix years before cervical cancer develops. Two tests can help prevent cervical cancer or find it early:

- The Pap test (Pap smear) looks for precancers, which are cell changes on the cervix that might become cervical cancer if they are not treated appropriately.
- The HPV test looks for the virus that can cause these cell changes.

HPV vaccines are also available. Boys and girls should get all three doses of HPV vaccine when they are 11 or 12 years old. If a teen or young adult (through age 26) has not started or finished the series of three HPV vaccine shots, it's not too late.

Mobile apps for your smartphone

- [ASCCP Mobile](#)
- [Clue](#)
- WHO Reproductive Health – [iTunes](#) or [Google Play](#)

Tips from our docs

This month, our healthy tip is brought to you by **Martin Hickey, MD**.

Precancerous cervical cell changes and early cancers of the cervix generally do not cause symptoms. For this reason, regular screening through Pap and HPV tests can help catch precancerous cell changes early and prevent the development of cervical cancer. Possible symptoms of more advanced disease may include abnormal or irregular vaginal bleeding, pain during sex, or vaginal discharge.

Tell your healthcare provider if you experience:

- Abnormal bleeding, such as: bleeding between regular menstrual periods, after sexual intercourse, after a pelvic exam, bleeding after menopause, pelvic pain not related to your menstrual cycle, heavy or unusual discharge that may be watery, thick, and possibly have a foul odor.
- Increased urinary frequency.
- Pain during urination.

These symptoms could also be signs of other health problems, not related to cervical cancer. If you experience any of the symptoms above, talk to a healthcare provider.

Additional resources

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Cervical Cancer Awareness](#)
- [National Cancer Institute: Cervical Cancer](#)
- [Health Finder](#)
- [National Cervical Cancer Coalition](#)