



# Women, mark your calendars

Regular screenings can help prevent cervical cancer



Thanks to regular screenings, cervical cancer is a lot less common than it used to be.<sup>1</sup> That's because Pap tests – the tests used to screen for cancer of the cervix – help doctors spot cancer and cells that could turn into cancer.<sup>2</sup> So just getting checked for cancer can actually help prevent you from getting it later.

When cervical cancer is detected early, it is easier to treat. Many times, it can be cured.<sup>3</sup> That's why regular screenings are so important.

## What is cervical cancer?

The cervix is the part of a woman's womb (or uterus) that connects to the birth canal (or vagina). Cancer of the cervix is almost always caused by the human papillomavirus, or HPV.<sup>2</sup> HPV is a common virus that can be passed from one person to another during sex.<sup>4</sup> The virus is so common that most adults have had it at some point. Sometimes it goes away on its own, but other times it can cause changes in the cells of the cervix that can turn into cancer.<sup>3</sup>

Cervical cancer doesn't usually cause symptoms early on, so women ages 21 to 65 should have regular screenings – at least every three years.<sup>4,5</sup> Later, cervical cancer can cause:<sup>3,4</sup>

- Bleeding from the vagina after sex, between periods, or after menopause.
- Pain in the pelvis or lower belly.
- Pain during sex.
- Discharge from the vagina that isn't normal.

The Pap test can screen you for cervical cancer, and an HPV test can screen for the virus that causes cervical cancer.<sup>5</sup> Talk with your doctor about which tests you should have, and how often you should be screened.

For more information, the latest research and treatment news and online support groups for women diagnosed with cervical cancer, check out the Cervical Cancer Health Center on WebMD. Go to [webmd.com/cancer/cervical-cancer](http://webmd.com/cancer/cervical-cancer).



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#### Sources

- 1 National Institutes of Health website: Cervical Cancer (accessed November 2014): [report.nih.gov/nihfactsheets/viewfactsheet.aspx?csid=76](http://report.nih.gov/nihfactsheets/viewfactsheet.aspx?csid=76).
- 2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website: Cervical Cancer Awareness (accessed November 2014): [cdc.gov/cancer/dpcp/resources/features/CervicalCancer/](http://cdc.gov/cancer/dpcp/resources/features/CervicalCancer/).
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- 4 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website: Cervical Cancer (accessed November 2014): [cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/pdf/cervical\\_facts.pdf](http://cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/pdf/cervical_facts.pdf).
- 5 National Cancer Institute website: Pap and HPV Testing (accessed November 2014): [cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/detection/Pap-HPV-testing](http://cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/detection/Pap-HPV-testing).

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