



# Cervical Cancer

## HOW MANY WOMEN GET CANCER OF THE CERVIX?

Each year, the American Cancer Society predicts that over 10,000 women in the U.S. will develop cervical cancer and approximately 4,000 women will die from this disease. When found and treated early, however, cervical cancer can often be cured.

## HOW IS CANCER OF THE CERVIX FOUND?

Cervical cancer was once one of the most common causes of cancer death for American women. Since 1955, the number of deaths from cervical cancer has declined significantly. The main reason for this change is the use of the Pap test (also known as a Pap smear). A Pap test can show precancerous cells, which can then be treated so that cancer is prevented. Early cervical precancers or cancer often have no signs or symptoms. That's why it's important for women to have regular Pap tests. Symptoms usually appear when the cancer is further along.

## CAN CERVICAL CANCER BE PREVENTED?

Since the most common form of cervical cancer starts with precancerous changes, there are two ways to stop this disease from developing. The first way is to prevent the precancers, and the second is to find and treat precancers before they become cancerous.

## THE AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY AND THE AMERICAN COLLEGE OF GYNECOLOGISTS RECOMMEND THE FOLLOWING GUIDELINES FOR EARLY DETECTION:

- Start screening at age 21 regardless of behavior, risk factors and sexual history.
- Women ages 21 – 29 should have a Pap test every 3 years (co-testing for human papillomavirus [HPV] is **not** recommended).
- Women ages 30 – 65 may screen with a Pap test every 3 years or may choose to lengthen the screening interval with a combination of Pap test and HPV testing every 5 years.
- Women older than 65 who have had adequate prior screening and are not high risk may stop screening.
- Women after a hysterectomy with removal of the cervix and with no history of cervical cancer may stop screening.
- Women with HPV, HIV infection, a compromised immune system, in-utero exposure to diethylstilbestrol, previous treatment of a high-grade precancerous lesion or cervical cancer should continue screening.

## **WHAT IS HPV?**

HPV stands for human papillomavirus, which is an infection that may cause changes to the cervix. Almost everyone has had HPV at some time; however, the infection usually doesn't last because your body is able to fight it. If the infection continues, the changes to the cervix may become precancerous cells. If not found and treated early, it may turn into cancer. That's why it is so important to have regular Pap tests to detect any changes to the cervix caused by HPV.

## **WHERE DO I GET A PAP TEST?**

- Family doctor
- OB/GYN doctor

## **WHY IS A PAP TEST IMPORTANT TO ME?**

A Pap test can tell if you have cancer of the cervix early, while it's easier to cure. Some women believe that they do not need exams by a health care professional once they have stopped having children. This is not correct. Women should continue to follow guidelines from the American Cancer Society and American College of Gynecologists and the advice of your doctor, who can help you determine the right Pap test schedule for you.

