



January is Cervical Cancer Awareness Month!

Continue watching for cervical cancer quiz questions, statistics, and to find out how you might be eligible for free screening.

True or False?

The human papillomavirus (HPV) causes cancer.

True

The correct answer is **True**.

The most important risk factor for cervical cancer is being infected with HPV. There are more than 150 types of HPV, and of those, the high-risk types, including HPV 16 and HPV 18, are linked to a high risk of causing cervical cancer.

Infection with HPV is common. In most people the body can clear the infection by itself. But sometimes the infection doesn't go away and becomes chronic. Chronic infection with HPV, especially when it's caused by certain high-risk types, can cause certain cancers over time, including cervical cancer.

True or False?

Cervical cancer can often be prevented.

True

The correct answer is **True**.

The two ways to help prevent cervical cancer are getting a HPV vaccine if you are eligible and getting regular screening tests.

HPV is the main cause of cervical cancer and pre-cancer. Vaccines are available that can help prevent infection by certain types of HPV, including the types most strongly linked to cervical cancer. The vaccines only work to prevent HPV infection – they will not treat an infection that's already there. So, to work best, the HPV vaccine should be given before a person is exposed to HPV. The ACS recommends boys and girls get the HPV vaccine between the ages of 9 and 12. Teens and young adults ages 13 to 26 years who have not received the HPV vaccine or who have not received all of their shots should get the vaccine as soon as possible. Vaccination of young adults will not prevent as many cancers as vaccination of children and teens.

Getting regular screening tests with the HPV test or the Pap test can find pre-cancers before they can turn into cancer. Cervical cancers start from cells with pre-cancerous changes. The change from cervical pre-cancer to cervical cancer usually takes many years. Treating pre-cancers can prevent almost all invasive cancers.

True or False?

HPV infection can be treated to help prevent cervical cancer.

False

The correct answer is **False**.

There's no treatment for HPV itself. But most genital HPV infections go away with the help of a person's immune system within about 2 years.

Even though HPV can't be treated, the cell changes caused by an HPV infection can. For instance, pre-cancer changes caused by HPV can be found by Pap tests and treated to keep them from turning into cancer over time.

True or False?

The only cancer the Pap test screens for is cervical.

True

The correct answer is **True**.

The Pap test is recommended to screen for cervical cancer, not other types of cancers. The Pap test helps find pre-cancers (cell changes on the cervix that might become cervical cancer if they are not treated appropriately) on the cervix so they can be treated. It can also find cervical cancer early, when treatment is most effective.

True or False

Cervical cancer usually doesn't cause symptoms right away.

True

The correct answer is **True**.

Early cervical cancers and pre-cancers hardly ever cause changes that a person would notice. As the cancer grows and spreads into nearby tissues, it may cause abnormal vaginal discharge or bleeding and/or pain during sex.

Regular screening tests and pelvic exams are important because many times there are no symptoms of this cancer.

True or False?

It is normal to have vaginal bleeding or spotting after you've gone through menopause.

False

The correct answer is **False**.

Any vaginal bleeding after menopause needs to be reported to your doctor. If you have not yet gone through menopause but notice that your periods are heavier, last longer than normal for you, or if you're having unusual bleeding between periods, talk to your doctor.

True or False?

If you have had any type of hysterectomy, you can't get cervical cancer and don't need to be tested for it.

False

The correct answer is **False**.

Individuals who have had a ***total*** hysterectomy (which includes taking out the uterus and cervix) no longer have a cervix and can stop screening (with Pap tests and HPV tests), unless the hysterectomy was done to treat cervical pre-cancer or cancer.

Individuals who have had a hysterectomy **without** removal of the cervix (called a *supra-cervical* hysterectomy) should continue cervical cancer screening according to the recommended American Cancer Society guidelines.

What is an HPV Test?

The HPV test looks for the human papillomavirus, which causes precancers that might become cervical cancers if they are not treated appropriately. The HPV test can be used as a screening test for people aged 30 to 65, or it can be done along with the Pap test. Talk to your doctor to find out which test you should have and how often you should be screened.

Current Screening Guidelines

If You Are 21 to 29 Years Old

You should start getting Pap tests at age 21. If your Pap test result is normal, your doctor may tell you that you can wait three years until your next Pap test.

If You Are 30 to 65 Years Old

Talk to your doctor about which testing option is right for you—

- **An HPV test only.** This is called *primary HPV testing*. If your result is normal, your doctor may tell you that you can wait five years until your next screening test.
- **An HPV test along with the Pap test.** This is called *co-testing*. If both of your results are normal, your doctor may tell you that you can wait five years until your next screening test.
- **A Pap test only.** If your result is normal, your doctor may tell you that you can wait three years until your next Pap test.

If You Are Older Than 65

Your doctor may tell you that you don't need to be screened anymore if—

- You have had at least three Pap tests or two HPV tests in the past 10 years, and the test results were normal or negative, and
- You have not had a cervical precancer in the past, or
- You have had your cervix removed as part of a total hysterectomy for non-cancerous conditions, like fibroids.

The Sage Cancer Screening Program

What is the Sage Program?

The Sage Program helps keep Minnesotans healthy through screening and early detection of breast and cervical cancer. Screenings are provided at participating locations **free of charge** to people who qualify.

To find out if you qualify, call Sage's
toll-free call center at
1-888-643-2584
or visit mnsage.com

