



Human Papillomavirus (HPV) & Cervical Cancer

- HPV is not new, but it is only in the last decade that its link to cervical cancer has been widely accepted by the scientific community. HPV infection is responsible for nearly 100% of cervical cancer in women and contributes to other cancers that can affect males or females. HPV also causes genital warts.
- HPV is the most common sexually transmitted infection in the United States. Currently more than 20 million men and women in the United States are infected. By age 50, at least 80% of sexually active women will have acquired HPV infection.
- Most will never know it because it usually has no symptoms and goes away on its own without causing any problems. Persistent infection is the most important risk factor for cervical cancer.
- The FDA has approved a vaccine to prevent cervical cancer, pre-cancerous genital lesions and genital warts – Gardasil, manufactured by Merck.
- Approximately 70% of cervical cancers are caused by two of the strains of HPV included in the newly licensed HPV vaccine. The vaccine has no effect on HPV infection that is present at the time of vaccination, or on existing cervical cell abnormalities or genital warts.
- Ideally vaccine should be administered before the onset of sexual activity, but sexually active females should still be vaccinated. HPV vaccine is given as a 3-dose series.
- Regular cervical cancer screening for all sexually active women and treatment of pre-cancerous lesions is still a key strategy to prevent cervical cancer.
- The Pap test is the gold standard for cervical cancer screening, and has been one of the most successful public health programs in the United States. In the past 40 years, widespread cervical cancer screening using the Pap test has resulted in a dramatic reduction in the number of cervical cancer cases and deaths.
- There is an additional test available you can have along with your Pap test to detect the HPV virus, called the HPV test. Ask your healthcare provider at your next visit about the HPV test.

If you would like more information visit the CDC's HPV web page
www.cdc.gov/std/hpv/default.htm