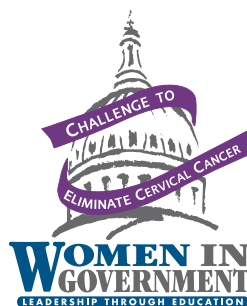


# Cervical Cancer & HPV

▶ What you need to know to protect yourself



## The Facts

# Protect yourself from cervical cancer

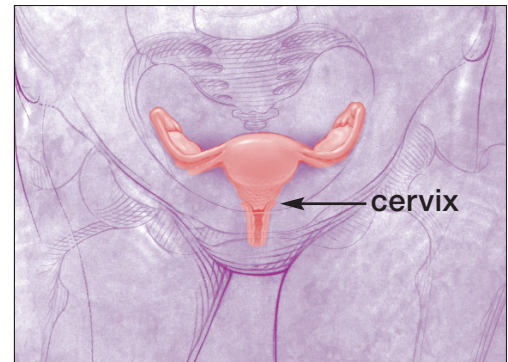
What you need to know about the human papillomavirus and cervical cancer

### Nearly all cases of cervical cancer are caused by the human papillomavirus.

The human papillomavirus (pronounced “pap-ah-LO-mah”), also called HPV, is a very common virus. In fact, most people get HPV at some point during their lives. There are several strains of HPV, some of which can cause harmful cell changes in a woman’s cervix. If these cell changes are not treated, cervical cancer may develop.

### Cervical cancer can be prevented.

You can protect yourself against cervical cancer by getting screened regularly with advanced and appropriate screening technologies. Your doctor can determine if you have harmful cell changes in your cervix that can be treated before they develop into cervical cancer. Your doctor also may be able to tell you if you carry the virus that puts you at increased risk of developing cervical cancer.



*The term cervical cancer refers to cancer in the part of the uterus that opens to the vagina, called the cervix.*

### Having HPV is nothing to be ashamed of.

Any person who has engaged in sexual activity can get HPV. In fact, at least 80 percent of sexually active women in the United States will have HPV by age 50. Yet most are unaware that they have an HPV infection.<sup>1</sup>

### Having HPV does not mean you will definitely get cervical cancer.

Most women who have HPV do not get cervical cancer. Their bodies fight off the virus before it causes any problems. You have a greater chance of developing cervical cancer if you have HPV for many years because your body has not fought off the virus.

### The types of HPV that cause cervical cancer do not cause symptoms.

There are typically no symptoms with the types of HPV that can lead to cervical cancer. So, most women are not aware of cell changes in their cervix or whether they are in the early stages of cervical cancer. That’s why it is so important to get screened regularly.

<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for HIV, STD and TB Prevention, Division of Sexually Transmitted Diseases. STD prevention: Genital HPV infection [fact sheet]. Accessed from <<http://www.cdc.gov/std/HPV/STDFact-HPV.htm>>.

# Getting screened for cervical cancer

### Cervical cancer is detected using several methods.

There are two types of tests that are used for cervical cancer screening:

- 1** The Pap test (also known as Pap smear or cytology) looks for cell changes in the cervix that could indicate pre-cancer or cancer. When found early, cell changes can be treated before cervical cancer ever develops. Liquid-based Pap tests are more effective in detection than the traditional Pap smear.
- 2** The HPV test uses advanced technology to detect certain HPV types that can lead to cervical cancer. An HPV test, used in combination with a Pap test if you are age 30 or older, helps your doctor know if you are at increased risk for developing cervical cancer. The HPV test is also used as follow-up for women under 30 with inconclusive Pap test results.

### When and how cervical cancer screening is conducted depends on your age.

The American Cancer Society recommends that cervical cancer screening should begin for women within three years of becoming sexually active, or at age 21, whichever comes first.

**Women under age 30** should be screened every year with the traditional Pap test or every 2 years using the liquid-based Pap test. Beginning at age 30, women who have had 3 normal Pap test results in a row may get screened at least every 2 to 3 years with either the liquid-based or traditional Pap test.

**Women age 30 and over** should get screened every 3 years with either the liquid-based or traditional Pap test **AND** an HPV test.

Consulting your doctor is the best way to determine your screening schedule.<sup>2</sup>

*“My advice to women is to be proactive about your gynecological health. Have a conversation with your doctor and find out about getting screened for cervical cancer with the most advanced and appropriate tests. No woman should have to suffer or die from cervical cancer.”*

*Christine Baze, Musician and Cervical Cancer Survivor*



## Steps to Take

# Steps to take

- **If you are under the age of 30, schedule a Pap test.**
  - Ask your doctor to use a “liquid-based” Pap test.
  - Ask your doctor to be sure that an HPV test is run if your results are inconclusive (also referred to as atypical squamous cells of undetermined significance or ASC-US).
- **If you are 30 or over, schedule a Pap test along with an HPV test.**
  - Call your doctor’s office before your appointment to let them know that you would like an HPV test done at the same time as your Pap test.
  - If you have insurance, check with your specific plan about your particular cervical cancer screening coverage options. Almost all insurance companies will pay for you to have an HPV test. You can also check with your local public health department for low-cost or free screening options available in your area.

**The most important thing is to make sure you get screened.**

- **The week of your doctor’s visit:**

Write down any questions you may have for your doctor. If you are nervous about asking your questions, rehearse them first with a friend or a family member.
- **At your appointment:**

Remind your doctor of the tests that you want and ask any other questions you have about your health.
- **Ask your doctor when you can expect the results.**

You can request that you are called when the results are in.
- **Congratulate yourself for taking the necessary steps to prevent cervical cancer.**

*“Women need to be their own best healthcare advocate. They should not just assume that their doctor is using the most advanced screening tests. If they want an HPV test as part of screening, they should ask their healthcare provider for it. They should also make sure they get copies of their own cervical cancer screening results.”*

*Marie Savard, M.D., Clinical Associate Professor of Medicine, University of Pennsylvania*



# New cervical cancer prevention opportunities

### **HPV vaccines are a critical step toward eliminating cervical cancer.**

Two HPV vaccines have been developed. Clinical data indicate that both vaccines are safe and effective.

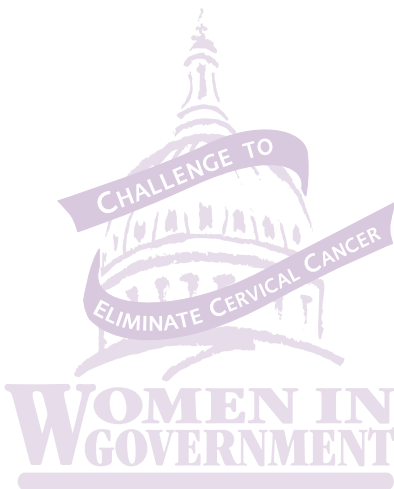
The federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved one of these vaccines in June 2006. "Gardasil" is safe and effective at preventing the two HPV types that cause approximately 70 percent of all cervical cancers and 90 percent of genital warts.

### **Who will receive the HPV vaccine?**

The FDA approved the use of "Gardasil" for women and girls ages 9 to 26.

### **HPV vaccines will not replace screening.**

Advanced and appropriate screening, such as HPV testing, will remain vitally important to cervical cancer prevention, as the HPV vaccines now available do not target all HPV types that cause cervical cancer.



### ***Join the Challenge to Eliminate Cervical Cancer Campaign***

In 2004, Women In Government launched the *Challenge to Eliminate Cervical Cancer Campaign*. This campaign supports state legislators' efforts to improve public education about cervical cancer and HPV and to help ensure that all women have access to the most advanced and appropriate prevention technologies and strategies available.

To learn more, see how your state is performing in the fight against cervical cancer, or find out what you can do to encourage action in your state, visit: [www.womeningovernment.org/prevention](http://www.womeningovernment.org/prevention)

**AMWA**

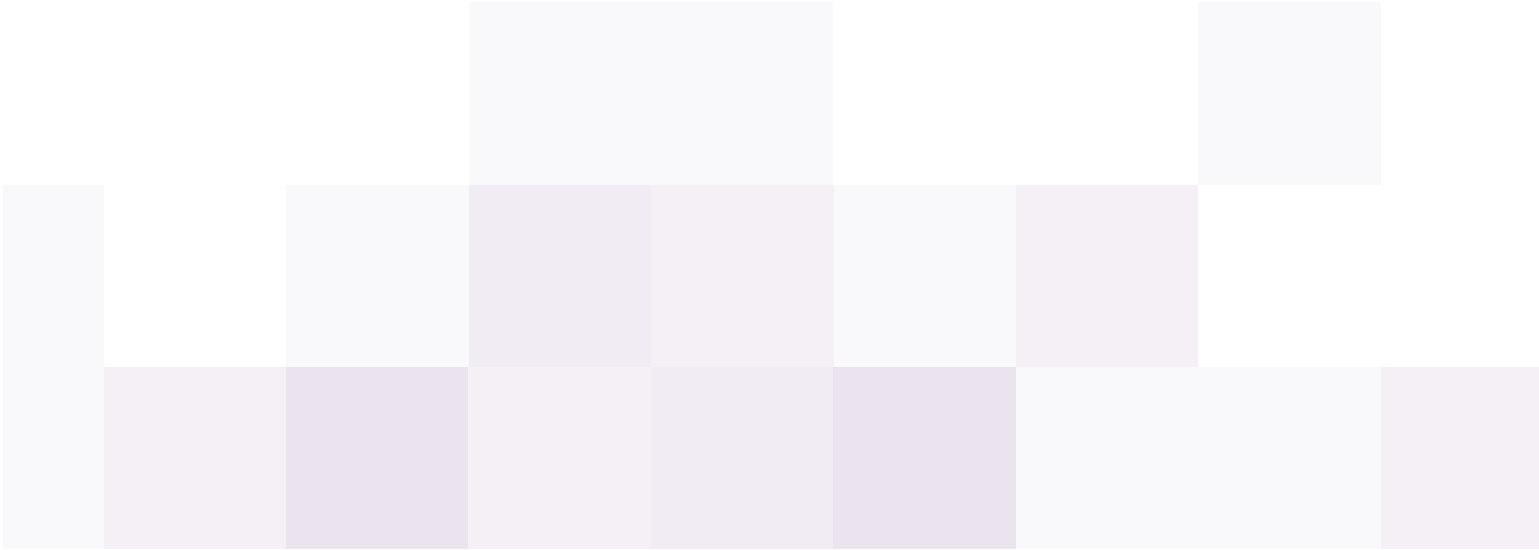
American Medical Women's Association

*"AMWA is dedicated to the elimination of cervical cancer. We are committed to promoting access for all women to the most advanced cervical cancer screening and preventive technologies, such as HPV testing, and, for those who are eligible, HPV vaccination."* - American Medical Women's Association (AMWA)

# Where can I learn more about HPV & cervical cancer?

- Women In Government HPV & Cervical Cancer Policy Resource Center . . . . . [www.womeningovernment.org/prevention](http://www.womeningovernment.org/prevention)
- American Medical Women's Association. . . . . [www.amwa-doc.org](http://www.amwa-doc.org)
- American Cancer Society . . . . . [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)
- American Social Health Association . . . . . [www.ashastd.org](http://www.ashastd.org)
- Association of Reproductive Health Professionals. . . . . [www.arhp.org](http://www.arhp.org)
- Coalition of Labor Union Women: Cervical Cancer Prevention Works . . . . [www.cluw.org/cervcancer.html](http://www.cluw.org/cervcancer.html)
- Gynecologic Cancer Foundation, National Cervical Cancer Public Education Campaign. . . . . [www.cervicalcancercampaign.org](http://www.cervicalcancercampaign.org)
- National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program . . . . . [www.cdc.gov/cancer/nbccedp/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/nbccedp/index.htm)
- Popsmeat. . . . . [www.popsmeat.org](http://www.popsmeat.org)
- Tamika and Friends . . . . . [www.tamikaandfriends.org](http://www.tamikaandfriends.org)
- The ISIS Project . . . . . [www.theisisproject.org](http://www.theisisproject.org)

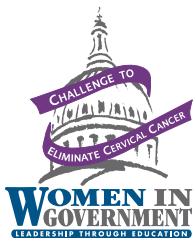
This brochure is produced by Women In Government and American Medical Women's Association.





## Cervical cancer is preventable with regular and accurate screening.

This brochure can help you understand the human papillomavirus, cervical cancer, and what you can do to protect yourself.



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