

Public Health, Epidemiology and Prevention

PEP Talk

Pinellas County Health Department • January 2007

January is Cervical Cancer Prevention Month

Get tested & know the risk factors

Cervical cancer begins in the lining of the cervix. This cancer does not form suddenly. First, cells begin to change from normal to pre-cancer and then to cancer. This can take a number of years, although it can happen more quickly. For some women, these changes go away without any treatment. Others need treatment to keep them from changing into true cancers.

Several **risk factors** increase a woman's chance of getting cervical cancer. For cervical cancer, the most important risk factor is infection with **HPV (human papilloma virus)**. HPV is passed from one person to another during sex. Often HPV infection goes away on its own without treatment.

Even though HPV is a risk factor for cervical cancer, most women with HPV don't get cervical cancer. Other factors must exist for this cancer to develop. Some of these factors are listed below.

Smoking: Women who smoke are about twice as likely as those who don't smoke to get cervical cancer.

HIV infection: HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. Being HIV positive makes a woman's immune system less able to fight both HPV and early cancers.

Chlamydia infection: This is a common kind of bacteria that can infect women's sex organs. It is spread during sex. Long-term infection can cause other serious problems.

Birth control pills: Long-term use of birth control pills increases the risk of this cancer. Some studies show a higher risk after five or more years of use. You should talk to your doctor about the pros and cons of birth control in your own case.

Having many pregnancies: Women who have had many full-term pregnancies have an increased risk of this cancer.

Low income: Unfortunately, low-income women are at greater risk. This may be because they cannot afford good health care, including Pap tests.



Most cervical cancer can be prevented.

There are two ways to prevent this disease.

The first way is to **prevent pre-cancers**. This is best done **by avoiding risk factors**.

Young women can delay having sex until they are older. Women of all ages can protect against HPV by having few sexual partners and not having sex with people who have had many partners. HPV does not always produce warts or other symptoms, so it's hard to tell if someone is infected. Condoms provide some protection against HPV when used correctly and they also help protect against AIDS and other diseases.

There is a **vaccine** that can protect against HPV. The vaccine consists of three shots over one year. The vaccine doesn't protect against all types of HPV, so Pap tests are still needed. **Talk to your doctor or health care provider about the vaccine for HPV.**

The second way to prevent cancer of the cervix is to **have a Pap test**. The Pap test can detect HPV infection and pre-cancers. Treatment of these problems can stop cervical cancer before it develops fully into an invasive cancer. **Talk to your doctor or health care provider about getting a Pap test.**

The Pinellas County Health Department has a FREE Breast and Cervical Cancer Program for women who have low income and are 50 to 64 years of age. This program includes breast and pelvic exam, Pap test, and mammogram. Call us at (727) 824-6917 for information or to make an appointment.



To learn more about cancer, including cervical cancer and HPV, visit www.cancer.org

For the New Year: Ten Steps to a Healthier Life

Start your new year off right with this **ten-step countdown** for living longer, better and happier:

Number 10:



Be Informed. For health information you can trust, here are two web sites: www.womenshealth.gov and www.healthfinder.gov

Number 9:

Avoid Illegal Drugs and Alcohol.

For women, the definition of moderate drinking stops at one glass. And where illicit drugs are concerned there is no such thing as "moderate" use. For more information visit www.samhsa.gov

Number 8:

Be Good To Your Bones. No matter what your age, you need calcium and vitamin D. For healthy bones, replenish your body's calcium every day with foods like milk and dairy products, tofu, leafy green vegetables, canned salmon or sardines and calcium-fortified juices or breads. Talk to your doctor about calcium supplements.

Learn more at www.osteoporosis.org

Number 7:

Take Medicine Wisely. Read labels, follow instructions carefully and remind your doctor or pharmacist about any other medicines or supplements you might be taking that could interact with your medication.

Learn more at www.fda.gov



Number 6:

Play It Safe. Avoid injuries. Buckle up. Wear a bike helmet. Use smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.

Wear sunscreen and UV protected sunglasses. Use street smarts and common sense. Practice safe sex. Learn more about at www.cdc.gov/ncipc/



Number 5:

Get Checked. Get regular checkups, preventive exams and immunizations. Don't forget self-exams, too.

Number 4:

Don't Smoke. It's the leading preventable cause of death in our country.

For tips on how to quit smoking, go to www.cdc.gov/tobacco/how2quit



Number 3:

Eat Smart. It's the secret to good health. Eat plenty of fruits, vegetables and grains.

Enjoy a variety of foods from each food group, For information on how to eat right go to www.eatright.org



Number 2:

Get Moving. It's the other secret to good health. Just 30 minutes of physical activity over the course of the day can improve the way you look and feel, both physically and mentally. Check out the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute's Guide to Physical Activity for more information at www.nhlbi.nih.gov

Number 1:

Be Happy! Take time for yourself. Get connected with family, friends and community. Have fun and play! Do things you enjoy!

Visit the Food and Drug Administration's Take Time to Care web page at www.fda.gov/womens/ttc.



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