

## How can I find out more about cervical cancer screening?

For help understanding the results of your screening tests, go to [www.arhp.org](http://www.arhp.org).

*\* ARHP does not endorse Web sites but these resources may be useful.*

### Non-Profit Organizations

#### American Social Health Association (ASHA)

Information about HPV and cervical cancer prevention  
[www.ashastd.org](http://www.ashastd.org)

#### American Society for Colposcopy and Cervical Pathology (ASCCP)

Information on the study, prevention, diagnosis and management of lower genital tract disorders.  
[www.asccp.org](http://www.asccp.org)

#### Association of Reproductive Health Professionals (ARHP)

Information about HPV and cervical cancer prevention  
[www.arhp.org](http://www.arhp.org) and [www.arhp.org/PapResults](http://www.arhp.org/PapResults)

#### National Women's Health Resource Center

"Health Center" on cervical cancer  
[www.healthywomen.org](http://www.healthywomen.org)

#### Planned Parenthood

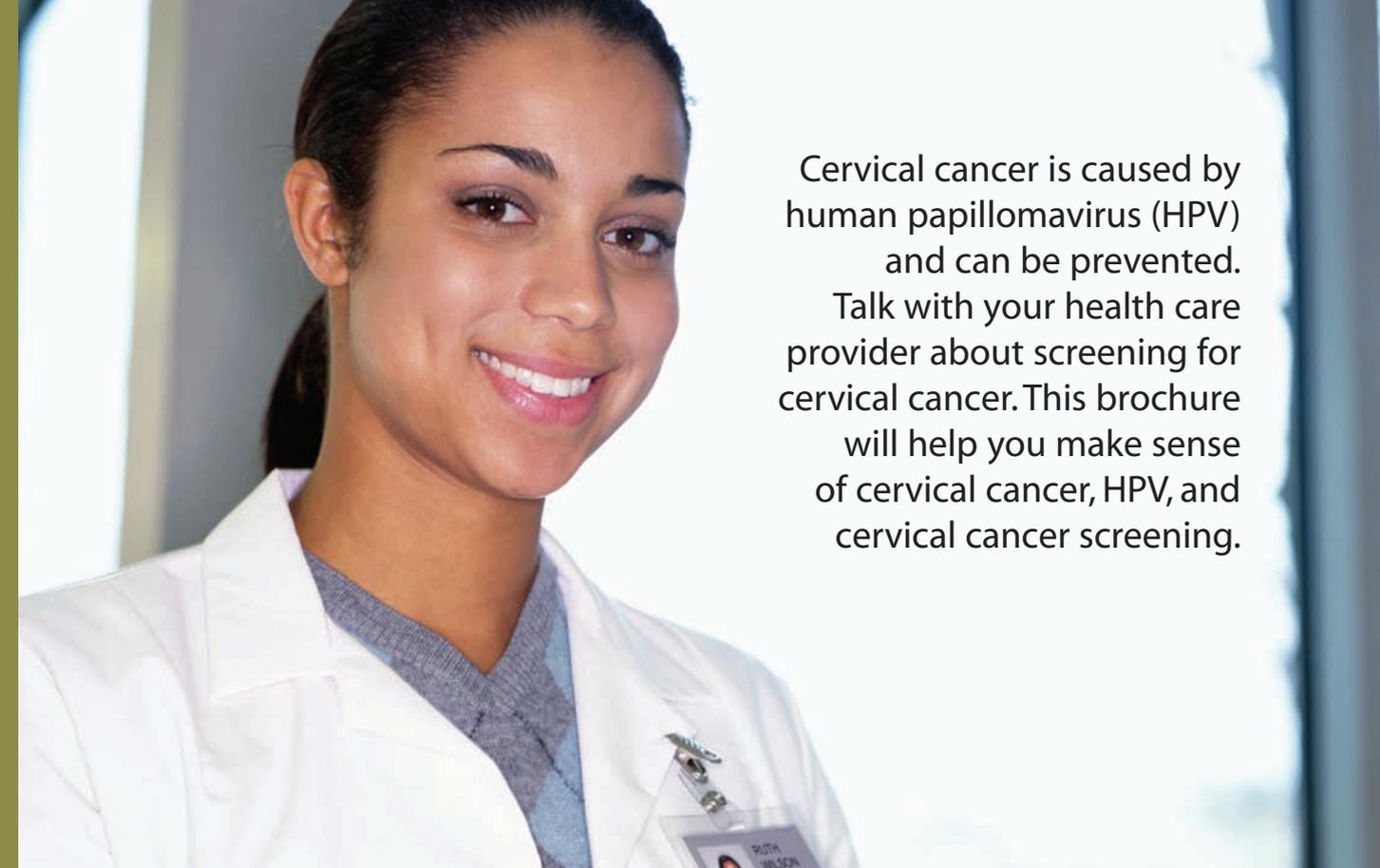
Information on cervical cancer prevention  
[www.plannedparenthood.org](http://www.plannedparenthood.org)

### Government Agency

#### National Cancer Institute

Cervical cancer screening information  
[www.nci.nih.gov/cancertopics/pdq/screening/cervical/patient](http://www.nci.nih.gov/cancertopics/pdq/screening/cervical/patient)

# A Woman's Guide to Understanding HPV and Cervical Cancer



Cervical cancer is caused by human papillomavirus (HPV) and can be prevented.

Talk with your health care provider about screening for cervical cancer. This brochure will help you make sense of cervical cancer, HPV, and cervical cancer screening.

## Making Sense of Cervical Cancer

### What is cervical cancer?

- The cervix is the lower part of your uterus (womb).
- Cancer of the cervix (cervical cancer) is a serious but preventable disease.
- Screening tests can find changes in cervical cells before cancer develops.
- Changes in cervical cells before cancer develops are called dysplasia (dis-PLAY-zha).
- Removing cells that have dysplasia can prevent cervical cancer.
- If left untreated, dysplasia can lead to cervical cancer.
- Screening tests can help prevent cervical cancer.
- Cervical cancer can be cured if it's found at an early stage.

### What causes cervical cancer?

- Cervical cancer is caused by a virus called human papillomavirus (HPV).
- HPV is not the same as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV, which causes AIDS) or herpes simplex virus (HSV, which causes cold sores and genital herpes).
- Infection with HPV is very common among adults in the United States. In fact, most people will have HPV at some point in their lives.
- Usually, your body's immune system fights off the infection, and HPV goes away on its own.

ASSOCIATION OF REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH PROFESSIONALS



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# Talking

## with Your Partner About HPV

Finding out you have HPV can be disturbing. You may be concerned that your partner was unfaithful. Your partner may think that you were. It's really important to make sure you both have the facts about HPV:

- Most adults have HPV at some time during their lives.
- HPV doesn't cause symptoms and usually goes away on its own.
- Most people with HPV don't know they have it.
- Usually it is impossible to know which partner gave a person HPV.
- HPV is not a sign that you or your partner was unfaithful.
- It is not helpful or fair to blame your partner if you have HPV.

Having an open conversation with your partner about HPV is important, so you are both informed and can both make safe decisions about your health.

## Making Sense of HPV

### Is HPV infection serious?

- There are many types of HPV.
- The types that can lead to cervical cancer are called **high-risk types**.
- Other types, called **low-risk types**, may cause genital warts but do not cause cervical cancer.
- High-risk HPV is a problem only when it doesn't go away. If it stays in your body for a long time, it can lead to cervical cancer.

### Are there symptoms of HPV?

- No, HPV infection doesn't cause symptoms, so most

people don't know they have it.

- A person can have HPV for a very long time before it's found.

### How does a person get HPV?

- HPV is spread from one person to another by skin-to-skin contact in the genital area.
- **HPV can be spread even if there is no intercourse.**
- HPV can be spread by vaginal, anal, and possibly oral sex.

### Are there any ways to avoid getting HPV?

Four things can reduce your risk for getting HPV:

- **Get vaccinated.** The HPV vaccine is safe and effective in preventing the majority of cervical cancers, precancer, and abnormal Paps. It can also prevent the majority of genital warts.
- **Avoid sexual contact.** By abstaining from sexual intercourse and any skin-to-skin contact in the genital area, you can avoid getting HPV.
- **Limit your sexual partners.** Have sex with just one person, who has sex only with you.
- **Use condoms.** Condoms don't fully protect from HPV, but they can lower the chance you'll get it. Condoms also help prevent HIV, herpes, and other sexually transmitted infections.

## Making Sense of Cervical Cancer Screening

### What screening tests are done for cervical cancer?

There are two main kinds of screening tests:

- **The Pap test**
- **The HPV test**

### What is the Pap test?

- The Pap test is used to look for abnormal cervical cells.
- Pap tests are often done during the pelvic exam portion of a well-woman visit (see **Stay Healthy** section of this brochure).
- During a Pap test, your health care provider will collect a sample of cervical cells for analysis by a laboratory.
- About 90% of Pap test results are normal.
- If the test result is abnormal, you may need more tests.
- **In most cases an abnormal Pap result does not mean that a woman has cancer.**

### What is the HPV test?

- The HPV test is a very accurate way to tell if high-risk HPV is present in a woman's cervix.
- This test can use the same sample of cells taken for the Pap test or a separate sample taken right after the Pap.

- A positive test result means a woman has high-risk HPV. She should be followed closely to make sure the infection goes away and that she does not develop abnormal cells.
- **A positive HPV test result does not mean that a woman has cancer.**
- Also, a positive HPV test result is **not** a sign that you or your partner had sex outside the relationship. A person can have HPV for a long time before it's found.

### When would an HPV test be done?

- The HPV test is used in two ways:
  - To see if a woman with a borderline Pap test result (one that shows unusual cells but not dysplasia) needs additional tests.
  - To screen for cervical cancer, along with the Pap test, in women aged 30 or older. Women 30 or older who have HPV are more likely to have had it a long time. That means they have a greater risk of developing cervical cancer.
- Women in their 20s don't need an HPV test in addition to the Pap test. HPV infection is very common in this age group and usually goes away.
- The HPV test is not used for men. Most of the time, men don't develop health problems from HPV.

### When should women be screened for cervical cancer?

- Experts recommend that a woman's first Pap test be done by age 21 or three years after she becomes sexually active with vaginal intercourse—whichever is first.
- Women under age 30 should speak to their health care provider about how often to have a Pap test.
- Women age 30 or older can have an HPV test along with the Pap test. Women who have a normal Pap test result and a negative HPV test result should have both tests repeated in three years.
- Women age 70 or older should discuss with their health care provider whether or not to continue cervical cancer screening.
- Women who have had a total hysterectomy (surgery to remove the uterus and cervix) that was not performed to treat cancer or dysplasia don't need to be screened.

# Stay Healthy

All women should have a regular visit with a reproductive health care provider to stay healthy. This "well-woman" visit is a chance to talk to your health care provider about:

- Problems with your menstrual cycle
- Birth control
- Sexuality
- Infertility
- Menopause (the change of life)
- Sensitive topics, such as depression or a harmful relationship

The well-woman visit is different for each woman, because every woman's needs are different. During the well-woman visit, your health care provider:

- Can answer your questions and address any concerns you have.
- Will do a breast exam and check for some common diseases, such as high blood pressure.
- Might perform a pelvic exam, which may include cervical cancer screening. *(Not all women need screening every year. Your health care provider can tell you how often you should be screened.)*

## Talk to Your Health Care Provider

Screening tests for cervical cancer can be confusing.

If you have any questions about the tests, talk to your health care provider.