



# Newsletter

## Cervical Cancer

Compiled by Dr. Kenechi

### 'UNDERSTANDING CERVICAL CANCER?'

The cervix is the lowermost part of the uterus (womb) that leads to the vagina. It connects the Vagina to the Womb.

Any of the following could be signs or symptoms of cervical cancer:

- Blood spots or light bleeding between or following periods
- Menstrual bleeding that is longer and heavier than usual
- Bleeding after intercourse, douching, or a pelvic examination
- Increased vaginal discharge
- Pain during sexual intercourse
- Bleeding after menopause
- Unexplained, persistent pelvic and/or back pain

### IF YOU NOTICE ANY OR ALL OF THESE SYMPTOMS, PLEASE VISIT THE HOSPITAL SO THAT YOUR DOCTOR CAN CHECK FOR THE FOLLOWING TESTS USED TO DIAGNOSE CERVICAL CANCER:

1. **Bimanual pelvic examination and** sterile speculum examination. In this examination, the doctor will check for any unusual changes in the patient's cervix, uterus, vagina, ovaries, and other nearby organs
2. **Pap test.** During a Pap test, the doctor gently scrapes the outside and inside of the cervix, taking samples of cells for testing.
3. **HPV typing test.** An HPV test is similar to a Pap test. The test is done on a sample of cells from the cervix. The doctor may test for HPV at the same time as a Pap test or after Pap test results show abnormal changes to the cervix. Certain types or strains of HPV, called high-risk HPV, such as HPV16 and HPV18, are seen more often in women with cervical cancer and may help confirm a diagnosis
4. **Colposcopy.** Colposcopy can also be used to help guide a biopsy of the cervix. During a colposcopy, a special instrument called a colposcope is used. The colposcope magnifies the cells of the cervix and vagina, similar to a microscope. It gives the doctor a lighted, magnified view of the tissues of the vagina and the cervix.
5. **Biopsy.** A biopsy is the removal of a small amount of tissue for examination under a microscope. Other tests can suggest that cancer is present, but only a biopsy can make a definite diagnosis.

Cervical cancer begins when healthy cells on the surface of the cervix change or get infected with human papillomavirus (HPV) and grow out of control, forming a mass called a tumor. Long-term infection of HPV on the cervix can result in cancer, leading to a mass or tumor on the cervix. A tumor can be cancerous or benign. A cancerous tumor is malignant, meaning it can spread to other parts of the body. A benign tumor means the tumor will not spread.

## THE FOLLOWING FACTORS MAY RAISE A PERSON'S RISK OF DEVELOPING CERVICAL CANCER:

- **Human papillomavirus (HPV) infection.** The most important risk factor for cervical cancer is infection with HPV. HPV is common. Most people become infected with HPV when they become sexually active, and most people clear the virus without problems. The HPV types, or strains, that are most frequently associated with cervical cancer are HPV16 and HPV18. Starting to have sex at an earlier age or having multiple sexual partners puts a person at a higher risk of being infected with high-risk HPV types.
- **Immune system deficiency.** People with lowered immune systems have a higher risk of developing cervical cancer. A lowered immune system can be caused by immune suppression from corticosteroid medications, organ transplantation, treatments for other types of cancer, or from the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which is the virus that causes acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS). When a person has HIV, their immune system is less able to fight off early cancer.
- **Herpes.** Women who have genital herpes have a higher risk of developing cervical cancer.
- **Smoking.** Women who smoke are about twice as likely to develop cervical cancer as women who do not smoke.
- **Age.** People younger than 20 years old rarely develop cervical cancer. The risk goes up between the late teens and mid-30s. Women past this age group remain at risk and need to have regular cervical cancer screenings, which include a Pap test and/or an HPV test.
- **Oral contraceptives.** Some research studies suggest that oral contraceptives, which are birth control pills, may be associated with an increased risk of cervical cancer and may be associated with higher-risk sexual behavior.
- **Exposure to diethylstilbestrol (DES).** Women whose mothers were given this drug during pregnancy to prevent miscarriage have an increased risk of developing a rare type of cancer of the cervix or vagina. DES was given for this purpose from about 1940 to 1970. Women exposed to DES should have an annual pelvic examination that includes a cervical Pap test as well as a 4-quadrant Pap test, in which samples of cells are taken from all sides of the vagina to check for abnormal cells.

