

Facts women and men should know about cervical cancer

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Credit: Florida International University

January is Cervical Cancer Awareness month and the message from the Centers from Disease Control and Prevention is that "no woman should die from cervical cancer."

Although every year more than 12,000 women in the United States are diagnosed with cervical cancer, and about 4,000 die from it, cervical cancer is highly preventable with regular screening tests. It can be cured if found early and treated.

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) and cervical cancer

"Almost all cervical cancers are caused by a type of HPV ([human papillomavirus](#)), a very common infection that can be passed from one person to another during sex," says Dr. Juana Montero, a gynecologist at FIU Health and Student Health Services.

It's estimated that about 79 million Americans have HPV, and many don't know they're infected. Most people with HPV never develop symptoms. In most cases the infections go away by themselves. When they don't, they can cause several types of cancers in both men and women including cancers of the cervix, vulva, vagina, anus, throat, tongue, tonsils and penis.

"Fortunately, we have vaccines against the types of HPV that cause most cervical cancers and genital warts," Montero says.

The CDC recommends preteen girls and boys get the HPV vaccine at age 11 or 12, but women up to age 26 and men up to age 21 can still get the vaccine. Montero encourages college-aged students, men and women, who were not vaccinated as children, to do so.

Preventing HPV can help prevent cervical cancer, and the best way to prevent HPV is to get vaccinated, practice safe sex, limit your number of sexual partners and not smoke.

Pap smear and HPV tests

The Papanicolaou test (or Pap smear) looks for pre-cancers, which are cell changes on the cervix that might become [cervical cancer](#) if not treated properly. The HPV test looks for the virus that can cause these cell changes. Both tests can be performed by your doctor at the same time. Montero says women should start getting Pap tests regularly at age 21. A Pap/HPV co-test is recommended for women 30 and over.

Provided by Florida International University

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