

Cervical cancer screening recommendations

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January is Cervical Cancer Awareness Month. Each year, more than 11,000 new cases of cervical cancer are diagnosed in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Many women often don't show any signs of [cervical cancer](#) in the early

stages of the disease. In advanced stages, symptoms may include [vaginal bleeding](#), pelvic pain or pain during intercourse.

Dr. Kristina Butler, a Mayo Clinic gynecologic oncologist, explains why preventive screenings are crucial.

Cervical cancer is a type of cancer that develops in the cells of the cervix. Women who have been exposed to HPV are most at risk. Routine Pap smears or HPV screenings can help detect precancerous cells.

"We recommend cervical cancer screening start at age 21 for most women and continue thereafter about every three to five years, depending on the type of screening that's performed. Annual pelvic exams are offered in the years a Pap smear is not due," says Dr. Butler.

Cervical cancer screening recommendations for older women

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that women receive a Pap smear until age 65.

"We do know that 16% of cervical cancers happen in women above the age of 65," says Dr. Butler.

She says it's important for women with high risk factors or postmenopausal women to continue regular screenings.

"Particularly if a woman has abnormal bleeding, or any bleeding after menopause, it's very relevant to be evaluated," explains Dr. Butler.

Practicing safe sex and getting the HPV vaccine can reduce your risk of cervical cancer. People can get vaccinated between the ages of 9 and 45.

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