

Many female undergrads unaware of risk factors for cervical cancer, skip Pap tests, researchers find

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Most female undergraduate college students surveyed by Robert Stempel College of Public Health & Social Work researchers were not familiar with risk factors for cervical cancer and had not had a Pap smear—the screening procedure for the disease.

Nasar U. Ahmed, associate professor in the Department of Epidemiology; Patria Rojas, assistant professor in the Department of Health Promotion and Disease Prevention; and Abraham Degarege Mengist, a [doctoral candidate](#) in the Department of Epidemiology, carried out the study of 141 FIU students. The team examined the correlation between what the students knew about cervical cancer and their adherence to Pap smear guidelines.

More than 60 percent of the participants had not had annual checkups within a year, and 69 percent of the participants had never received a Pap test. Students cited procrastination, lack of interest and

fear as reasons for being tested.

The findings are in contrast to previous assumptions that [college students](#) would be more likely to seek and obtain cervical cancer screenings because of their higher literacy when it comes to health, as well as their knowledge of risky sexual behaviors.

Students who knew that having multiple sexual partners was a risk factor for cervical cancer had higher odds of receiving a Pap test than those who didn't know the correlation between the number of [sexual partners](#) and the risk of cervical cancer, the researchers found.

"This study highlights the fact that there is loss of screening opportunities during regular medical visits to follow CDC guidelines and gynecological care," said Rojas.

The findings were published in the *Journal of the National Medical Association*.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, cervical cancer was once the leading cause of cancer death for women in the United States. Those numbers have seen a steady decline in the past 40 years because of regular Pap test screenings, which can detect precancerous cells before they turn into cancer.

According to the American Cancer Society, "In the U.S., it is estimated that 11,150 women will be diagnosed with cervical cancer, and approximately 3,670 will die of it."

While [cervical cancer](#) was once the number one killer of women from cancer in the United States, the invention of the Pap test in the 1940s has helped saved countless lives and it is now the 12th

deadliest cancer among women.

"Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable cancers, and knowledge is the key to its prevention," said Ahmed, the principal investigator of the study. "Screening for this [cancer](#) is done during an annual checkup that a majority of these students did not receive, and most of the surveyed students were not aware they could receive a Pap test through the university's Student Health Services.

"Knowledge and simple practice of a regular doctor's visit can prevent this disease and save many lives."

More information: Nasar U. Ahmed et al. Knowledge of Cervical Cancer and Adherence to Pap Smear Screening Test Among Female University Students in a Multiethnic Institution, USA, *Journal of the National Medical Association* (2020). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jnma.2020.03.007](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jnma.2020.03.007)

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