

# Protect Yourself

Against Cervical Cancer # HPVVaccinesCancerPrevention # PapTest

## Fact Sheet

### Cervical Health Awareness Month

#### **What is cervical cancer?**

Cervical cancer is cancer that starts in the cervix, the lowest part of a woman's uterus. Cancer can grow on the cervix—the same way it can grow on other body parts. Cervical cancer usually develops very slowly which means that it is one of the most preventable cancers. Almost all cervical cancers are caused by HPV.

#### **What is HPV?**

HPV, or the human papillomavirus, is a virus that can cause changes in the cells of the cervix. HPV is very common. About 14 million people are infected with HPV each year. In addition to cervical cancer, HPV can cause vaginal and vulvar cancer in women, penile cancer in men, and anal cancer, mouth/ throat cancer, and genital warts in men and women.

#### **How is cervical cancer found?**

A screening test called a **Pap test** can find cervical cancer and decreases women's chance of dying from cervical cancer. The Pap test is a simple test that collects and looks at cells from the surface of the cervix and vagina. If the cells are abnormal, a doctor will ask for more tests to be done. When pre-cancerous cells are found and taken out of the cervix, cervical cancer can be prevented. Regular Pap tests can find cancer before it starts!

#### **Who should get a Pap test?**

Women should start getting regular Pap tests at age 21. It is important to get Pap tests regularly. If you are older than 65 and have had good Pap test results for several years, or if you have had your cervix removed (during an operation called a hysterectomy), your doctor may tell you it is okay to stop getting regular Pap tests. Depending on your age and Pap test history, your provider may also test you for HPV.

#### **What is the HPV vaccine?**

The vaccine protects both girls and boys against HPV and the cancers/genital warts that HPV can cause. The HPV vaccine is recommended for girls and boys, 11 or 12 years old (and up until age 26 for those who haven't been vaccinated yet).

#### **How can I pay for a Pap test or HPV vaccine?**

If you have health insurance, check with your insurer to learn about your benefits and coverage. If you do not have insurance, you can still get regular Pap tests. Options for cervical cancer screening coverage in Maryland include:

1. Go to Maryland Health Connection (<http://marylandhealthconnection.gov/>) to find out if you qualify for Medicaid or for financial help to buy health insurance. Or call the Maryland Health Connection at 1-855-642-8572.
2. If you are a Maryland women aged 40-64 years and do not have health insurance, you may be eligible for no cost cancer screening through the Maryland Breast and Cervical Cancer Program. **Reach the program at 1-800-477-9774.**
3. The Vaccines for Children (VFC) Program is a federal program that offers vaccines at no cost for eligible children, ages 18 and under, through VFC-enrolled doctors. Contact the Maryland program at 410-767-6674.
4. Some pharmaceutical companies offer patient assistance programs to help pay for vaccination. Ask your healthcare provider about your other options.

