

# Your Health Matters

## SO, HOW IS YOUR CERVIX DOING?

If you can't answer, it is time for a pap test. No woman should die of cervical cancer. Cervical cancer is the second biggest killer in woman. Each year, approximately 12,000 women in the United States get cervical cancer.

The human papillomavirus (HPV) is the main cause of cervical cancer. HPV is a common virus that passed from one person to another during sex. Most sexually active people will have HPV at some point in their lives, but few women will get cervical cancer.

There are two tests that can either help prevent cervical cancer or find it early:

- The **Pap test** ( or Pap smear) looks for precancerous, cell changes, on the cervix that can be treated, so that cervical cancer is prevented, The Pap test also can find cervical cancer early, when treatment is most effective, The Pap test is recommended for women aged 21-65 years old. The Pap test only screens for cervical cancer.
- The **HPV test** looks for HPV, the virus that can cause precancerous cell changes and cervical cancer. The HPV test can be used to screen for cervical cancer along with the Pap test in women aged 30 years and older. It also is used to provide more information when women aged 21 years older have unclear Pap tests results.

If you are 30 or older, you may choose to have an HPV test along with the Pap test, If the results are normal, your chance of getting cervical cancer in the next few years is very low.

Almost all cervical cancers are caused by HPV. You are more likely to get HPV if you started having sex at an early age, or if you or your partner have had sex with several others. However, any women who has ever had sex is at risk for HPV.

How can you prevent cervical cancer?

- See your doctor regularly for a Pap test that can find cervical pre-cancers.
- Follow up with your doctor if your Pap test results are not normal.
- Get the HPV vaccine. It protects against the types of HPV that most often causes cervical, vaginal, and vulvar cancers. It is recommended for preteens (both boys and girls) aged 11 to 12 years, but can be given as early as age 9 and until age 26. The vaccine is given in a series of either two or three shots, depending on age. It is important to note that even women who are vaccinated against HPV need to have regular Pap tests to screen for cervical cancer.

Contact us at the Montgomery County Health Department by calling 573-564-2495. We offer HPV vaccination for adolescents and young adults. Contact us today to learn more about eligibility and availability.

The Montgomery County Health Department loves taking care of your family, and works every day to protect, promote and improve health in our community. To learn more, call 573-564-2495 or visit us online at [www.montgomerycountyhealth.org](http://www.montgomerycountyhealth.org) or on Facebook or Twitter @healthymoco. ■

