

Cervical Cancer

Breakthrough Vaccine

Cervical cancer is diagnosed in more than 11,000 women annually and claims 3,670 lives. The most important risk factor for cervical cancer, and abnormal pap smears, is infection with human papilloma virus (HPV).

HPVs are a group of more than 100 types of viruses transmitted by skin to skin contact. A subset of 15 'high-risk' HPVs are associated with the occurrence of cervical cancer and pre-cancers. Most people clear their HPV infection, however, chronic persistent infection with certain high-risk HPV infection is the strongest risk factor for developing cervical cancer. The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the drug, Gardasil, as a vaccine to prevent four types of the HPV virus.

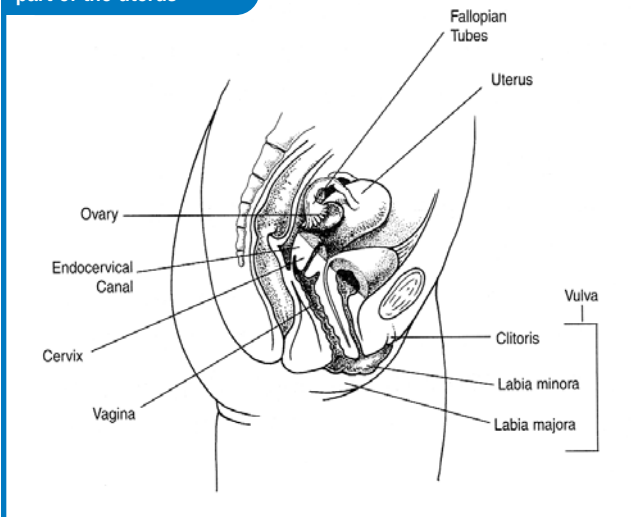


“This vaccine is a major advance in women’s health and cancer prevention that has the potential to save thousands of lives and reduce untold suffering,” said Martin Mahoney, MD, PhD, Department of Health Behavior, at Roswell Park Cancer Institute. “This vaccine is for prevention, not treatment, and is not a substitute for regular gynecological screenings such as the Pap test, a quick and painless procedure that checks for changes in the cells of the cervix that may indicate cancer.”

Who Should Get the Vaccine?

The vaccine is recommended for girls and women between nine and 26 years of age and is administered in a three injection series over six months. Side effects from vaccine are minimal and include pain, swelling and itching at the injection site and mild fever or nausea.

The cervix is the lower part of the uterus



CERVICAL CANCER

Cervical cancer was once a major killer of women. The National Cancer Institute estimates the 80% decrease in incidence and mortality from cervical cancer can be attributed to the use of the Papanicolaou test or Pap test. Regular screening with a Pap test and other tools can detect abnormal cell changes in the cervix before they turn in to cancer.

“The Pap test allows gynecologists to find abnormal cells and destroy them before they become invasive cancer,” says Shashikant Lele, MD, Chief of the Gynecologic Oncology Department at Roswell Park. “Women should have regular cervical cancer screenings to maintain their gynecological health.”

Signs and Symptoms

Early-stage cervical cancer has no symptoms. When symptoms do develop, they may include painful intercourse, bleeding after intercourse, irregular bleeding between periods, heavy menstrual flow and abnormal vaginal discharge.

Screening and Diagnosis

An annual Pap test is the screening test for cancer of the cervix. If the Pap test detects abnormal cells, a biopsy of the cervix is done with the use of a colposcope (a magnifying glass) where the walls of the vagina and cervix are examined to determine if cancer is present.

Treatment

The choice of treatment depends upon precancerous or cancerous conditions and stage of the cancer. The precancerous condition called dysplasia or carcinoma *in situ* is treated with laser, LEEP or cryosurgery treatment. It is important for patients to be aware of their condition so they can be actively involved in the decision-making process with their doctor.

Cancer confined to the cervix is usually treated by radical surgery with removal of lymph nodes and advanced cancers are treated with radiation therapy. Chemotherapy is used along with radiation for patients who have cancer that has spread to other organs.

Team Park

The Gynecologic Center at Roswell Park is staffed by a multidisciplinary team of highly specialized professionals with expertise in the care and treatment of all cancers of the reproductive system from diagnosis through follow-up. This multidisciplinary team offers the most effective means of diagnosis and treatment and provides detailed information about clinical studies that may offer patients the best chance for cure or extended quality of life.



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Free National Cancer Institute Publications:

Understanding Cervical Changes: A Health Guide for Women discusses Pap testing, interpreting abnormal test results and next steps, the importance of follow-up, and treatments for cell changes.

What You Need To Know About Cancer of the Cervix provides basic information on possible causes, symptoms, diagnosis, treatment and emotional issues and suggests questions to ask your doctor.

Human Papillomaviruses and Cancer: Questions and Answers is a fact sheet about the link between human papilloma viruses (HPV) infection and cancer.

The Pap Test: Questions and Answers is a fact sheet that describes the Pap test procedure, possible results and the link between HPV and cervical cancer.

To receive free copies of this information, please call Roswell Park's Cancer Information Program at 1-877-ASK-RPCI (1-877-275-7724) or email your request to ASKRPCI@RoswellPark.org

For more information about this, or any other type of cancer, please call our Cancer Information Program, toll-free at 1-877-ASK-RPCI (1-877-275-7724), send an e-mail to ASKRPCI@roswellpark.org, or visit www.RoswellPark.org on the Web.

For a consultation or second opinion, call our Referral Office at 1-800-ROSWELL (1-800-767-9355).