

FACT SHEET 3

WHAT IS CERVICAL CANCER?

This series of health education materials is designed to provide information to primary health care providers and the general public about the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) and cervical cancer prevention and control.

The series is comprised of the following health education materials:

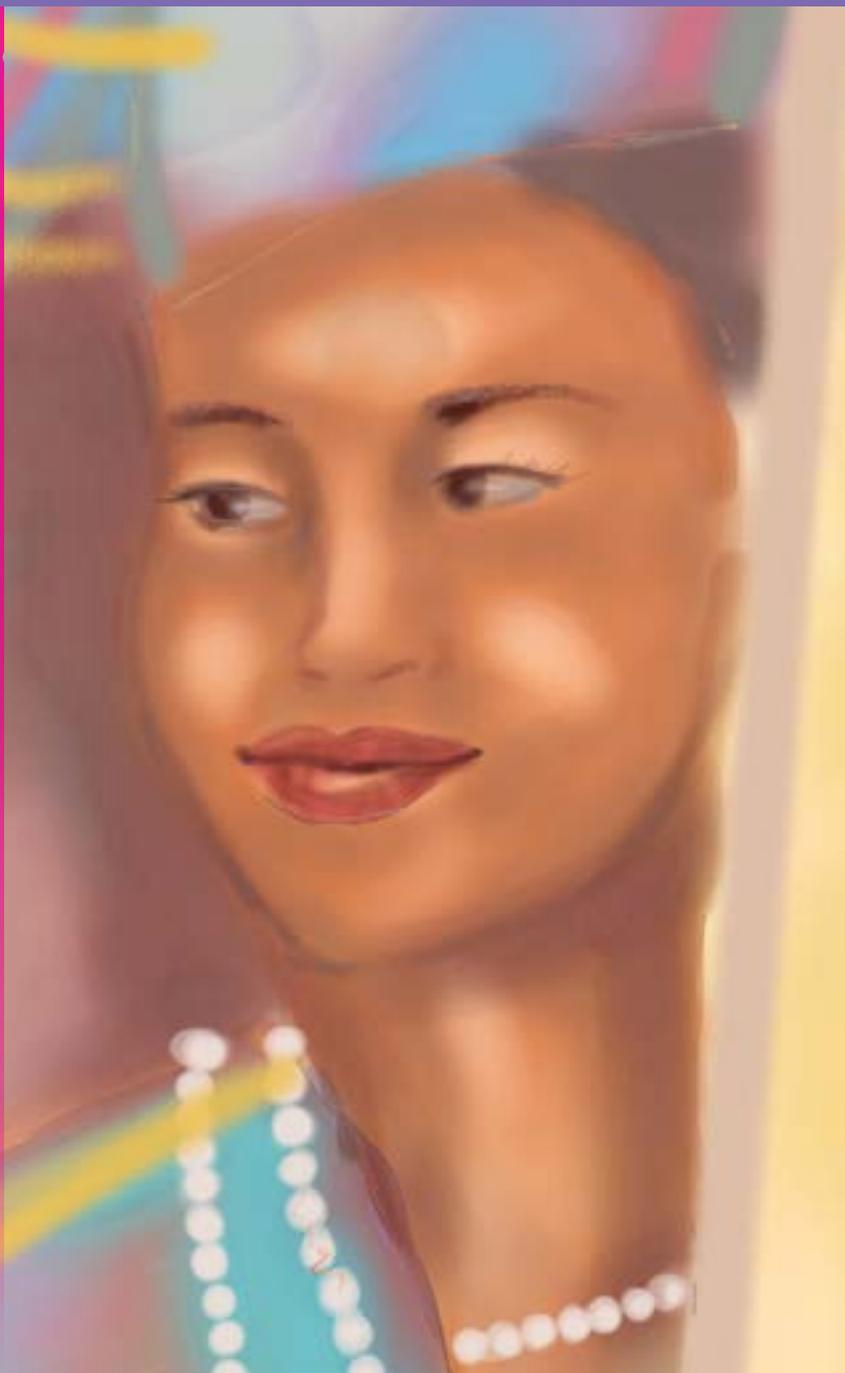
FACT SHEET 1:
HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS (HPV)

FACT SHEET 2:
HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS (HPV) VACCINES

FACT SHEET 3:
WHAT IS CERVICAL CANCER?

FACT SHEET 4:
EARLY DETECTION TESTS TO PREVENT CERVICAL
CANCER

FACT SHEET 5:
TREATMENT OF CERVICAL CANCER



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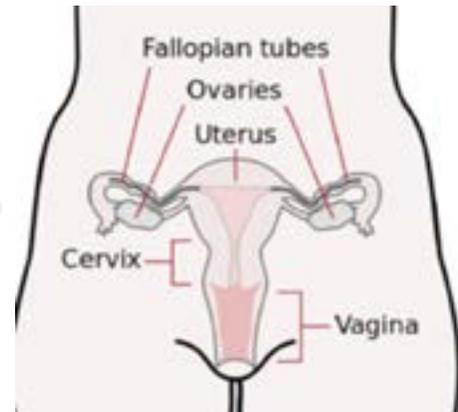
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CERVICAL CANCER
PREVENTION IN LATIN AMERICA
AND THE CARIBBEAN



This health education material provides information on what is cervical cancer and how it can be prevented.



WHAT IS CERVICAL CANCER?

Cancer is a disease in which cells multiply uncontrollably. When cancer develops in the cervix, or neck of the uterus, it is called cervical cancer. If the cancer continues to grow, it can spread to other parts of the body, beyond the cervix.

WHAT IS THE CAUSE OF CERVICAL CANCER?

Persistent infection with the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is the main cause of cervical cancer. HPV is a common infection, transmitted through skin to skin sexual contact. The majority of people will have an HPV infection during their lifetime, even though they do not know they have it, and many may not have any signs or symptoms of infection. HPV infection usually clears on its own, with the body's immune system response. However, in some people, especially in women older than 30 years of age, HPV infection may persist over time, and lead to changes in the cervix that can develop into cervical cancer.

Pre-cancerous lesions in the cervix are the first stage of changes, before cervical cancer develops. These lesions can be detected with screening tests, and treated effectively to prevent cancer from developing.

Cervical cancer can be treated and cured if it is detected in its early stages. If treatment is not provided, cervical cancer can be fatal.

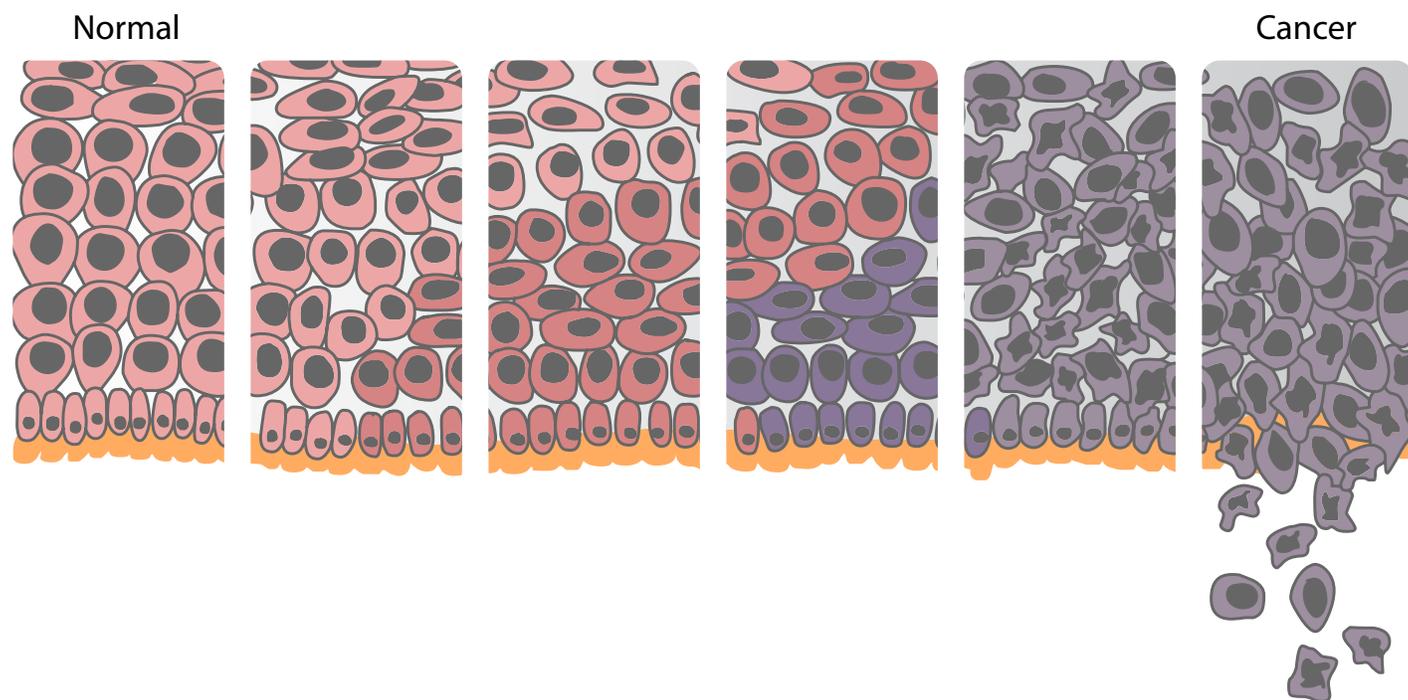
WHO DEVELOPS CERVICAL CANCER?

Women, generally over 30 years of age who have a persistent infection with HPV, the cause of the disease, may develop cervical cancer.

In addition, women more at risk for developing cervical cancer are those who:

- * have had multiple sexual partners
- * have given birth to three or more children
- * have given birth to their first child at an early age (before 17 years of age)
- * smoke cigarettes
- * have a disease that affects the immune system
- * are not regularly screened for cervical cancer

How cervical cancer develops



CAN CERVICAL CANCER BE PREVENTED?

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) infection is the main cause of cervical cancer. HPV infection can be prevented by HPV vaccines, administered prior to onset of sexual life, generally to girls between 9 and 14 years old. Cervical cancer can be prevented, by screening women for cervical pre-cancerous lesions, generally women over 30 years of age, and then treating the lesions.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE CERVICAL CANCER?

Women should seek medical care to be screened for cervical cancer, especially if they are over 30 years of age. This will involve a gynecological examination, with an early detection test to determine if a precancerous

lesion exists, or if cancer exists, or if there is a high risk for developing cancer because of an HPV infection.

If you are over 30 years of age, regardless of whether you are now sexually active or not, or whether you have had the HPV vaccine or not, get screened regularly.

Cervical cancer can be prevented, with HPV vaccines in young girls 9-14 years of age, and regular screening tests in women 30 years and older.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

- » World Health Organization. Comprehensive Cervical Cancer Control: A guide to essential practice. Second Edition.
- » World Health Organization. Create communication HPV vaccination strategies.
- » American Cancer Society, ACS. Prevention and early detection of cervical cancer.
- » American Cancer Society, ACS. Biopsy and Testing for Cancer Cytology Specimens.
- » Centers for Disease Control, CDC. Fact Sheet Cervical Cancer Campaign Know Your Body.
- » National Cancer Institute, NCI. What you need to know about cervical cancer.
- » National Cancer Institute, NCI. Significance of changes in the cervix. Guide to Women's Health.
- » Government of Australia. School HPV Vaccination Program.
- » Public Health Agency of Canada. HPV and Men: Questions and Answers.

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