

# Choosing Wisely<sup>®</sup>

*An initiative of the ABIM Foundation*



## Cervical cancer screening

Only get the tests and treatments you need

**T**he cervix is the opening between the vagina and the womb (uterus). Cancer of the cervix (or cervical cancer) kills more than 4,000 women in the United States every year. But almost all of those cases can be prevented.

A virus called HPV (human papillomavirus) causes almost all cases of cervical cancer. HPV is a sexually transmitted infection.

### How is cervical cancer prevented?

- The HPV vaccine prevents most HPV. The best time to get the vaccine is between ages 11 and 12. The vaccine can be given to women (and men) up to age 26 if they didn't get it earlier.
- Routine screening is also important. Women ages 21 to 65 should get regular cervical cancer screening. Depending on a woman's age, this can be done with Pap tests, HPV tests, or both. The tests can find abnormal cells early. The cells can be treated before they turn into cancer.



Most women should follow the screening advice. But some women don't need certain tests or treatments. Here's what you need to know.

### **Young women with an abnormal Pap test don't always need to be treated right away.**

In the past, doctors thought that abnormal Pap tests always meant cervical cancer. But now we know that isn't so. Minor abnormalities usually don't turn into cancer. Most go away on their own in a year or two, without any treatment.

If you are under 25 and your Pap test showed minor abnormalities, you should have the test again every year. This is to see if the problem goes away or gets worse.

If you keep having abnormal test results, your doctor usually does an exam called a colposcopy. During this exam, the doctor examines the cervix and may remove some abnormal cells. These are examined to see if they are pre-cancer cells. This means that they might turn into cancer.

You should only get treatment if tests show that you have pre-cancer cells (also called severe dysplasia).

### **Treatments can have risks.**

The treatments for pre-cancers are minor surgical procedures. Some treatments can increase the risk of complications during pregnancy, such as premature birth. That's why you should only get treatment if it's necessary.

### **You usually don't need Pap tests or HPV tests after a hysterectomy.**

During a hysterectomy, the uterus and cervix are usually removed. Usually you no longer need Pap and HPV tests. However, you still need these tests if:

- Your cervix was not removed during your hysterectomy.
- You had the hysterectomy because you had cancer or pre-cancer. Even if your cervix was removed, there's a rare chance of cancer coming back in the vagina.

This report is for you to use when talking with your healthcare provider. It is not a substitute for medical advice and treatment. Use of this report is at your own risk.

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