Five things to know about cervical cancer screenings

FROM PREMERA BLUE CROSS BLUE SHIELD OF ALASKA



Access to affordable care is the cornerstone for a healthy community, and getting your preventive screenings is a critical component of staying healthy. Here are five things you need to know about cervical cancer and preventive screenings. They'll help you understand what screenings are, why they're important, and how to get them.

1. **What is cervical cancer and am I at risk?** Cervical cancer is cancer that starts in the cells of the cervix, the lower end of the uterus. The cervix connects the uterus to the vagina. Cervical cancer develops slowly over time, but changes in the cervical tissue may appear before cancer develops.

   The human papillomavirus (HPV) causes virtually all cervical cancers. People who become sexually active at a young age and have multiple sexual partners are more likely to become infected with a high-risk type of HPV. Knowing your family history is the best marker of your risk factor and may help determine at what age you should start screenings.

2. **What are the signs of cervical cancer?** Everyone is different. Early on, cervical cancer usually doesn't have any symptoms, making it hard to detect. If you do notice symptoms, such as bleeding after sex; bleeding between periods or periods that are heavier or longer than normal; vaginal discharge that is watery, has a strong odor or contains blood; or pelvic pain or pain during sex, contact your provider right away.

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3 **What is a cervical exam?** A cervical exam is usually part of your annual wellness visit and can be done in your provider's office. You may get a Pap test (sometimes call a Pap smear) and a separate HPV test, or a combined HPV/Pap test that uses an HPV test and a Pap test together to check for both high-risk HPV and cervical cell changes. A Pap test takes a sample of cells from your cervix that are then sent to a lab for review. The US Preventive Services Task Force recommends people with a cervix start getting their first Pap and HPV test at age 21, then every 3 years, unless you notice symptoms. Cervical exams are often part of your regular wellness visit and are usually covered as part of that visit. Exams that are diagnostic, meaning it was ordered because of a symptom or concern, are covered, but there may be a cost to you.

4 **Most cervical cancers are preventable.** Regular screenings, HPV vaccination with Gardasil 9, and using condoms, can greatly reduce your risk of exposure to HPV, the leading cause of cervical cancer.

5 **Where to and how to get care:** Find an in-network PCP using the Find Care tool on **premera.com**. Sign in and browse by category using the Primary Care tile. An obstetrician/gynecologist (Ob/Gyn) can also provide these screenings.

If you are diagnosed with cervical cancer, Premera is here to support you. Find more information on our Care Essentials page, under **Cancer** or **Women's Health**. Our **Personal Health Support** care team can answer questions about treatment and coverage, plan and coordinate your care, and transfer medical records. Speak with a care manager at 888-742-1479, Monday through Friday, 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., and Saturday, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Pacific Time.

Want to know about other covered cancer screenings?
Use our 5 Things Guides on **breast**, **colorectal**, and **general preventive** screenings.

Basic Information About Cervical Cancer, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, **https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/basic_info/**, August 21, 2023

What Is HPV (Human Papillomavirus?, American Cancer Society, **https://www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/hpv/what-is-hpv.html**, April 30, 2024

Notice of availability and nondiscrimination **800-508-4722 | TTY: 711**

Call for free language assistance services and appropriate auxiliary aids and services.
Tumawag para sa mga libreng serbisyo ng tulong sa wika at angkop na mga karagdagang tulong at serbisyo.
Llame para obtener servicios gratuitos de asistencia lingüística, y ayudas y servicios auxiliares apropiados.
무료 언어 지원 서비스와 적절한 보조 도구 및 서비스를 신청하십시오.
Hu thov kev pab txhais lus pub dawb thiab lwm yam khoom pab dawb thiab kev pab cuam ua tsim nyog.
Звоните для получения бесплатных услуг по переводу и других вспомогательных средств и услуг.
呼吁提供免费的语言援助服务和适当的辅助设备及服务。
呼籲提供免費的語言援助服務和適當的輔助設備及服務。
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ติดต่อขอบริการช่วยเหลือด้านภาษาฟรีพร้อมความช่วยเหลือและบริการอื่น ๆ เพิ่มเติม
Fordern Sie kostenlose Sprachunterstützungsdienste und geeignete Hilfsmittel und Dienstleistungen an.
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Appelez pour obtenir des services gratuits d’assistance linguistique et des aides et services auxiliaires appropriés.
Ligue para serviços gratuitos de assistência linguística e auxiliares e serviços auxiliares adequados.
Chiama per i servizi di assistenza linguistica gratuiti e per gli ausili e i servizi ausiliari appropriati.
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