You Can Prevent Cervical Cancer: Vaccinate Early Screen Regularly
If you are a teen or young adult, you are probably busy with school, work, friends and fun. Cancer prevention is probably not a real concern for you. If you are a parent of preteens or young teenagers, the health issues that concern you probably include accident prevention, nutrition, and helping your child to avoid drugs, tobacco and alcohol use. You may consider cancer prevention important for you or your parents, but not your children. THINK AGAIN!

This pamphlet is designed to inform you of an important cervical cancer prevention breakthrough for girls and women aged 9–26 — and the need for boys to be vaccinated, too.

The thought of anyone getting cancer can be scary. Fortunately, a combination of vaccination and regular Pap tests make cervical cancer one of the most preventable types of cancer.

But the vaccination should also be given early — it is recommended for girls and boys ages 11–12. It can be given as young as age 9 and up to age 26.

What Is the Cervical Cancer Vaccine?

The cervical cancer vaccine (also called the Human Papillomavirus or HPV vaccine) protects against the virus that causes almost all cervical cancers.

Cervical cancer affects more than 10,000 women each year in the United States. Worldwide, cervical cancer is the second most common cause of cancer death in women. The cervical cancer vaccine can save lives and prevent fear, and the costs related to cervical cancer and abnormal Pap tests.

What’s HPV and How Do You Get it?

HPV is a family of very common viruses that cause almost all cervical cancers, plus a variety of other problems like common warts, genital warts and plantar warts. HPV also causes cancers of the vulva, vagina, anus, and even cancers of the head and neck.

Women and men become infected with HPV types that cause cervical cancer through sexual intercourse and sexual contact. Most women and men will be exposed to HPV during their lifetime.

For more information about HPV, visit foundationforwomenscancer.org.
How Can I Protect Myself Against Cervical Cancer?

Regular Pap screening beginning at age 21 can detect problems related to HPV infection before cancer develops. And now new vaccines can provide protection against the HPV virus types that cause 70% of cervical cancer.

If you never get exposed to HPV, you’ll be at extremely low risk for cervical cancer. But, the only sure protection from HPV is lifelong sexual abstinence. Regular condom use also provides some protection against the prevent spread of HPV infection.

Who Should Get the Cervical Cancer Vaccine?

Guidelines are summarized below:

- Routine vaccination is recommended for both girls and boys ages 11–12
- There are two vaccine types
  - The quadrivalent vaccine is recommended for both girls/women and boys/men, aged 13–26
  - The bivalent vaccine is recommended for girls and women only
- Ideally, the vaccine should be given before first sexual contact, but women and men up to age 26 who are sexually active should still be vaccinated

Why Should Girls/Women Get the Vaccine? Why Should My Daughter Get the Vaccine?

Consider that cervical cancer most often affects women during their reproductive years. This cancer robs some women of the ability to bear children and threatens the lives of young mothers.

You may not know anyone who has had cervical cancer. But almost every adult woman knows someone who has been treated for Pap test abnormalities. That is because HPV infection is so common. It is a relief that a Pap test can help find early cervical changes when they are treatable.

Now, women have an important additional option for protection. The cervical cancer vaccine takes prevention a giant leap forward by blocking the first step along the pathway to cervical cancer, HPV infection. Vaccination plus regular screening with Pap tests provide the best protection against developing cervical cancer.
Why Should Boys/Men Get the Vaccine? Why Should My Son Get the Vaccine?

The quadrivalent vaccine protects against genital warts in males and females, and recent evidence has shown it can prevent anal cancer in men and women.

How Is the Vaccine Given?

The vaccine is given in the arm or thigh 3 times. At the first visit, 1–2 months later and 6 months after the first dose. The best protection is achieved after all 3 shots are given. It is not known at this time whether booster shots will be needed later, but so far that is not recommended.

Is the Vaccine Safe?

Yes, studies show that the vaccine is extremely safe and very similar to other routinely recommended vaccines. The most common side effects are redness and soreness where the shot was given. Headaches (like when you have a cold or fever) and fever can also occur. Over the counter pain and fever medications will help if you have symptoms.

As with any new medication, safety issues will continue to be monitored.

Who Should Not Get the Vaccine?

You should not be vaccinated if you are acutely ill, if you have a history of allergy to yeast, or if you are pregnant or trying to become pregnant. Risks to an unborn baby are thought to be low, but as with any new medication, there may be unknown risks.

You should get the vaccine if you are in the recommended age group even if you are being treated for an abnormal Pap test, or if you've had an abnormal Pap test, genital warts or an HPV infection in the past.

Will Insurance Cover the Cost?

You will need to check with your insurance company. If your insurer has covered other routine childhood vaccinations, the cervical cancer or HPV vaccine will likely be covered for girls/women and boys/men in the recommended age group.
Anything Else?

Please remember that the cervical cancer vaccine does not protect against other sexually transmitted infections. You must still make thoughtful and careful choices about sexual activity.

Remember also that vaccinated women still require regular Pap tests and/or HPV test when recommended if they have been sexually active. Ask your health care provider about the screening schedule that is best for you.

Additional information about cervical cancer vaccines, cervical cancer screening, prevention and comprehensive information about HPV is available from:

• Foundation for Women’s Cancer foundationforwomenscancer.org
• Centers for Disease Control (CDC) cdc.gov
• American Cancer Society cancer.org

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Please consider a donation to the Foundation for Women’s Cancer to help us reach more women with these important messages.

You can donate online at foundationforwomenscancer.org, contact Headquarters at 312.578.1439 or info@foundationforwomenscancer.org.
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