

## PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR LOVED ONES FROM CERVICAL CANCER

Alabama has the highest death rates from cervical cancer in the U.S., even though this is one of the few cancers that can be **prevented**. We have the tools to save lives, and most women and children can access them at no cost in our state.

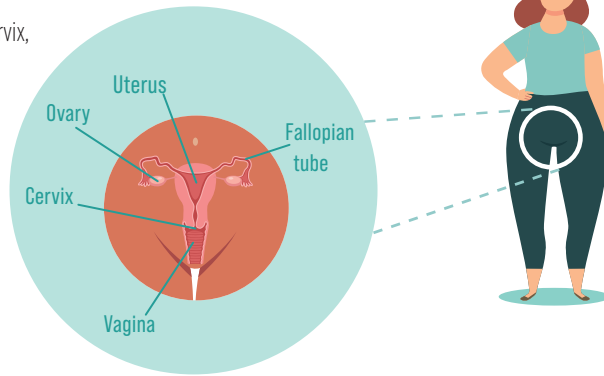


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## What is cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer is a cancer of the cervix, which is part of the female organs.



## How serious is cervical cancer?

It is a devastating cancer that can not only impact a woman's life but also her entire family and community. Many women have cervical cancer in their 30s, 40s, and 50s, which is younger than the onset of many other cancers. The good news is that this cancer can be **prevented**.

## Who is at risk for cervical cancer?

Every woman who has a cervix (lower, narrow part of the uterus). This includes women with no family history of cancer.

## What causes cervical cancer?

The Human Papillomavirus, or HPV, causes nearly all cervical cancers. There are several types of HPV. Some types cause warts on the skin, others cause genital warts, and others cause cancer - including cervical, anal, penis, mouth, and throat cancer. HPV is a very common virus, and for most people, it goes away by itself. It only becomes a problem if the virus persists for many years and causes changes to the affected cells. If not detected and treated, these cells can become cancerous.



### HPV causes others cancers among men and women besides cervical cancer.

*While the most common HPV-associated cancer among women is cervical cancer, oropharyngeal cancers (cancers of the back of the throat, including the base of the tongue and tonsils) are the most common HPV-associated cancers among men. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that roughly 44% of the HPV-associated cancers between 2014-2018 occurred in men. It is estimated that over 90% of anal cancers, 60% of penile cancers, and 70% of vaginal or vulvar cancers are caused by HPV.*

## Does cervical cancer have any symptoms?

Not early on. Usually when a woman starts having symptoms, it is because the cancer is already advanced. So it is important to be screened regularly before symptoms appear.

## How can we prevent cervical cancer?

We have two major tools to prevent cervical cancer: **HPV vaccination** and **cervical cancer screening**. Also, timely follow-up is critical if any abnormalities are found during screening.



## HPV VACCINATION

There is a vaccine that can prevent HPV infection, and, consequently, can prevent cervical and other HPV-associated cancers. The HPV vaccine is very safe and covered by most health insurances or the Vaccines for Children (VFC) program for those who qualify. Ask your child's health care provider or contact your local health department.

### Who should get the HPV vaccine?

The HPV vaccine is most effective when children are vaccinated **BEFORE** they are exposed to the virus. All girls and boys who are 11 or 12 years old should receive the HPV vaccine when they get their other routine vaccinations, but children can get it as young as 9 years old.

For teens and young adults who did not get the HPV vaccine when they were younger, it is recommended through age 26, and they should receive the vaccine as soon as possible.

For children 14 years of age and younger, two doses are required. For teens 15 years of age and older, three doses are recommended.

HPV vaccination is approved by the FDA for adults up to age 45 based on health care provider recommendation.

### How well does the HPV vaccine work?

The HPV vaccine works extremely well. Studies show that this vaccine provides almost 100% protection against the types of HPV it targets.



### Is the HPV vaccine safe?

The HPV vaccine went through years of extensive safety testing before being licensed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The FDA only licenses a vaccine if it is safe, effective, and the benefits significantly outweigh the risks. Since its approval, over fifteen years of monitoring and research have continued to show that the HPV vaccination is very safe.

## How much does the HPV vaccine cost?

Most health insurance plans cover the HPV vaccine. The Vaccines for Children (VFC) program also provides vaccines for children ages 18 years and younger who are uninsured or whose health insurance does not pay for the vaccine, Medicaid-eligible children, and American Indian/Alaska Natives.



## CERVICAL CANCER SCREENING

Regular cervical cancer screening is recommended for women between 21-65 years. Often, women put off getting screened for several reasons: fear, shame, procrastination, lack of time, etc. They are afraid of the results because they do not want to know if they have cancer. However, the purpose of screening is to detect changes **BEFORE** it turns into cancer, and thus, **PREVENTING** disease.

Most health insurances cover cervical cancer screening. The Alabama Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program covers screening and follow-up among women who qualify for the program - <https://www.alabamapublichealth.gov/bandc/>

## What if the screening test comes back positive?

Women should not panic. They should follow up as recommended by the health care provider. Remember that the screening can detect changes in the cervix **BEFORE** it turns into cancer. So, it is possible that the health care provider will only follow these changes more frequently and/or treat them.



## Prevention of cervical cancer is in our hands:

- Children must be protected from HPV infection through vaccination.
- Adult women must be up to date with their cervical cancer screening. If the results of cervical cancer screening are abnormal, it is important to schedule further testing and/or treatment.
- The entire community can spread the word. Alabama can be a model to the world in preventing cervical cancer!

For more information on HPV and cancer, as well as facts on screening and vaccine, visit the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control at: <https://www.cdc.gov/hpv/index.html> or <https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/index.htm>

Operation **Wipe Out** is a partnership of several organizations to eliminate cervical cancer as a public health problem in Alabama. It will take everyone's effort, but it is totally within our reach. For more information, call (205) 778-8334 | email: [CervicalCancerAL@uabmc.edu](mailto:CervicalCancerAL@uabmc.edu)



*This program is a partnership between the Rotary Club of LaFayette, Rotary Club of Birmingham, University of Alabama at Birmingham Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology and O'Neal Comprehensive Cancer Center, TogetHER for Health, Auburn University, Quality of Life Health Services Inc., and the Alabama Department of Public Health, Chambers County School District, Circle of Care Center for Families, and Russell Medical Cancer Center.*