



You Can Prevent  
Cervical Cancer:  
Vaccinate Early  
Screen Regularly



National Cervical Cancer  
*public education campaign*



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 pre-teens 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 ages 9–26.



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

But the vaccination must be given early — it is recommended for girls 11–12, but girls and young women between the ages of 9–26 also may be vaccinated.

### 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 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 will be exposed to HPV during their lifetime.

**For more information on HPV log on to [www.cervicalcancerccampaign.org](http://www.cervicalcancerccampaign.org).**

### **How Can I Protect Myself Against Cervical Cancer?**

Regular Pap screening beginning at age 21 or within 3 years of the beginning of sexual activity can detect problems related to HPV infection before cancer develops. And now a new vaccine 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 abstinence. Regular condom use can also help prevent spread of HPV infection.

### **Who Should Get the Cervical Cancer Vaccine?**

Guidelines are summarized below:

- Routine vaccination is recommended for all 11 and 12 year old girls
- The vaccination series can be started for girls as early as age 9

- Ideally, the vaccine should be given before first sexual contact, but females up to age 26 who are sexually active should still be vaccinated
- Vaccination is also recommended for girls and women ages 13–26 who have not been previously vaccinated. However, a decision about whether to vaccinate a woman aged 19–26 should be made based on an informed discussion between the woman and her provider regarding her risk of previous HPV exposure and potential benefit from vaccination.

### Why Should I 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 Pap tests provide the best protection against developing cervical cancer.

### How Is the Vaccine Given?

The vaccine is given in the arm or thigh 3 times. At the first visit, 2 months later and 4 months after that. 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.

## Is the Vaccine Safe?

Yes, studies show that the vaccine is extremely safe. The most common side effects are redness and soreness where the shot was given. Headaches (like when you have a cold or fever) are also common. 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.

## Are There Girls and Women 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 vaccine will likely be covered for girls and women in the recommended age group.

## What About Vaccination for Boys and Men?

That question is being studied, but at this time the vaccine has only been approved and recommended for girls and women.



## 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 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 HPV infection is available from:

- The National Cervical Cancer Public Education Campaign  
[www.cervicalcancercampaign.org](http://www.cervicalcancercampaign.org)
- The Women's Cancer Network  
[www.wcn.org](http://www.wcn.org)
- The Centers for Disease Control (CDC)  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- The American Cancer Society  
[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

This brochure was developed by the Gynecologic Cancer Foundation (GCF).

GCF was established by SGO in 1991 to develop educational programs for women, and create awareness about the prevention, early detection and treatment of gynecologic cancers. The Foundation also supports research and training related to gynecologic cancers. As a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit charitable organization, GCF raises funds to support these programs from both public and private sources.

To receive more information about our services or to contribute, please contact us.

Toll Free Number: 800.444.4441

Telephone: 312.578.1439

Fax: 312.578.9769

E-Mail: [info@thegcf.org](mailto:info@thegcf.org)

Web site: [www.thegcf.org](http://www.thegcf.org)

Address: GCF Headquarters  
230 W. Monroe, Suite 2528  
Chicago, IL 60606