



## January is Cervical Health Awareness Month GET THE FACTS

Genital Human Papillomavirus (HPV) infections are very common. In fact, HPV is so common that most sexually active people should expect to be exposed to it and, if not vaccinated, infected by HPV at some point in their lives. Most people who have or have had HPV don't know it. About 79 million Americans are currently infected, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

- Cervical cancer and precancerous conditions can be detected during routine Pap tests. When caught early, cervical cancer is one of the most treatable cancers, with a 5-year survival rate of almost 100 percent.
- HPV is a common sexually transmitted infection that, in rare cases, can cause cervical and other gynecological cancers. The HPV vaccine prevents the spread of HPV and can prevent HPV-related cancers.

### In Texas...

- About 1,085 Texas women are diagnosed with cervical cancer annually, and each year more than 300 Texas women die of the disease.
- Planned Parenthood of Greater Texas provides a wide range of healthcare to detect and prevent gynecological cancers, including well-woman exams, Pap tests, advanced testing and treatment of abnormal and precancerous Pap results, and HPV vaccines.
- During the 2015 session, the Texas Legislature launched a politically motivated effort to eliminate Planned Parenthood health centers from the federal Breast and Cervical Cancer Screening program despite a 20-year partnership with the federal and state program. The ban took effect September 1 and has created barriers for uninsured Texas women.
- Despite the Texas Legislature's continued targeting of funding for women's health programs, Planned Parenthood health centers provide cervical health services to both insured patients and uninsured patients through grant funding and patient assistance funds.

### How exactly does HPV turn into cervical cancer?

In most cases, the body's immune system clears HPV naturally. But if it doesn't, when left untreated, abnormal cells caused by HPV can develop into cervical cancer. Cervical cancer takes years to develop. It can be prevented if changes in the cervix are found early and treated.



## **So what can I do to protect myself from HPV?**

- Get the HPV vaccine.
- Use protection if you have sex. While HPV is passed by skin-to-skin contact, condoms can lower the risk if used correctly.
- Talk with your sexual partners. You can be exposed to HPV by having skin-to-skin contact just once with someone who has the virus, so it's important to talk with your partner about the importance of being protected and safe.
- Get regular Pap tests. A Pap test can find abnormal cells in the cervix before the cells become cancer.

## **Is the HPV vaccine safe?**

Yes. The HPV vaccine is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of HPV, is safe, and is supported by leading medical organizations. The FDA has approved this vaccine and the CDC has recommended it for girls and boys aged 11-12. The American Cancer Society, the American Academy of Pediatrics, as well as Planned Parenthood, support ensuring all young people get the vaccine.

## **Who should get the HPV vaccine?**

Medical guidance recommends that both girls and boys get the vaccination when they are 11 to 12 years old because the vaccine works best when people receive it years before they start having sex. But even those who have had sex can benefit from the vaccine; it is available to anyone aged 9-26.

## **Is the vaccine less effective for women of color?**

One recent study found that African-American women might be less likely than white women to become infected with HPV 16 and 18; however, more research is needed in this area. The HPV vaccine offers full protection for any woman who is exposed to HPV 16 and 18, as well as potential protection for other types, and is still recommended for all women as a way to protect themselves against cervical cancer.

## **Does the HPV vaccine promote sex?**

No. Research shows that the HPV vaccine keeps young people healthy and safe, and it can give parents an opportunity to talk with their kids about sex and sexual health. Despite the myths, young people who get the HPV vaccine are no more likely to have sex than those who don't.

## **Is there a cure for HPV?**

Most HPV infections are harmless, do not require treatment, and go away by on their own. However, there is treatment for the abnormal cell changes in the cervix caused by HPV available at some Planned Parenthood health centers.