



# Know the basics when it comes to cervical cancer



**Each year in the United States, about 11,500 new cases of cervical cancer are diagnosed. Excellus BlueCross BlueShield is here for you, so you know what to be aware of:**

## **What is cervical cancer?**

Cervical cancer occurs when cells in the cervix grow out of control. When there are cervical cells that are abnormal but are not yet cancerous, it is called cervical precancer.

## **What are the causes?**

- Long-lasting HPV infections cause almost all cervical cancers. Two high-risk strains, HPV 16 and HPV 18, cause about 70% of cervical cancers worldwide. Nearly all people who are sexually active will become infected with HPV at some point.
- Most HPV infections go away on their own. If it doesn't, it can lead to abnormalities in the cervical cells, resulting in a precancerous lesion. If the lesion is not discovered and removed, it can develop into cervical cancer.

## Steps you can take towards prevention

Screening tests and the HPV vaccine can help prevent cervical cancer. Anyone with a cervix age 21-65 should be getting preventive screenings every 3-5 years. The three main ways to screen for cervical cancer are:

- **The HPV test:** Checks cells for high-risk HPV strains that can cause cervical cancer.
- **The Pap test:** Collects cervical cells so they can be checked for abnormalities caused by HPV that may - if left untreated - turn into cervical cancer. It can find precancerous cells and cervical cancer cells.
- **The HPV/Pap test:** Uses an HPV test and Pap test together to check for both high-risk HPV and cervical cell changes.

## Potential treatment plans

Cervical cancer can be treated in several ways depending on the type of cervical cancer and spread. The most common treatments include surgery, chemotherapy, radiation therapy and immunotherapy.

- **Surgery:** An operation in which doctors cut out the cancer.
- **Chemotherapy:** Use of special medicines to shrink or kill the cancer. The drugs can be pills you take, or medicines given in your veins, or sometimes both.
- **Radiation therapy:** Use of high-energy rays (similar to x-rays) to kill the cancer.
- **Immunotherapy:** Immunotherapy stimulates the immune system to fight cancer.



### Remember: The only way we'll beat cervical cancer is by facing it.

Talk to your doctor. Get recommended screenings. Stay informed about vaccination options. Turn to Excellus BlueCross BlueShield for resources on cervical cancer awareness and prevention. Because when you have the support and care you need to make health a priority, **everybody benefits.**

