

# About Cervical Cancer



## Risk Factors

- Gender - simply being female
- Infection - having had an HPV infection
- Cigarette Smoking
- Oral contraception use for five or more years
- High number of live births
- HPV exposure - having sex with a partner who is infected with HPV

Cervical cancer is cancer that forms in tissues of the cervix which is the mouth of the uterus. All women are at risk for cervical cancer. It most often occurs in women over age 30.

## Cervical Cancer in North Carolina

It was estimated that 123 women died from cervical cancer in North Carolina in 2014.<sup>1</sup> Human papillomavirus (HPV) is the main cause of cervical cancer. HPV is a common virus that is passed from one person to another during sex. At least half of all sexually active people will have an HPV infection at some point in their lives but most of these are cleared by the body. Only a few women will develop cervical cancer from an HPV infection.

## Prevention

Cervical cancer is easily detected through screening and can be prevented with the HPV vaccine. HPV vaccines are available and recommended for both males and females ages 9 to 26. An important way women can prevent cervical cancer is to have regular screening tests starting at age 21. Two tests can help prevent cervical cancer.

- Pap test (or Pap smear) - This test looks for precancers, which are cell changes on the cervix that may become cervical cancer if they are not treated early. Your doctor will tell you how often you should get a Pap test after your first one. If you are older than 65 years of age and have had normal Pap tests results for several years, your doctor may tell you that you do not need to have a Pap test any more.
- Human papillomavirus (HPV) test - This test looks for the virus that can cause the cell changes that may become cervical cancer if they are not treated early.

Women who are vaccinated against HPV still need to have regular Pap tests to screen for cervical cancer.

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<sup>1</sup> State Center for Health Statistics, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. North Carolina Central Cancer Registry. Projected New Cancer Cases and Deaths For All Sites, 2014. <http://www.schs.state.nc.us/schs/CCR/proj14site.pdf>