



Cervical Cancer

The cervix is the lower end of the uterus (womb). It is inside the vagina. Women with HIV are more likely to get cancer of the cervix. If a woman with HIV has this cancer, it is a sign of AIDS.

Symptoms

Cervical cancer often does not cause symptoms. When the cancer is advanced, a woman may have pain from sex, blood or a discharge from the vagina. There is rarely a lump.

Causes

More than 90% of all cancer of the cervix is linked to the human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is a common virus that is spread when you have sex with someone who has it. HPV can cause warts inside the mouth or on the sex organs. It also causes changes in cells that can turn into cancer.

There are more than 100 types of HPV. Five are linked to cancers in women and men. People with HIV are more likely to also have HPV.

Risk Factors

You may be at a higher risk if you:

- Have a high-risk strain of HPV
- Have HIV or AIDS
- Do not get regular pap tests
- Smoke
- Have given birth to three or more children
- Take birth control pills for more than 5 years

How to Know if You Have Cervical Cancer

When you get a Pap smear, the doctor takes a swab from the cervix to get a closer look at the cells. A doctor may also look at an enlarged view of the cervix. Acid may be used to spot cells that are not normal.

If a cancer is found, the doctor will decide what stage it is:

- Stage 0. The cancer is only in the top layer of the cervix.
- Stage I. The cancer has spread to the uterus.
- Stage II. The cancer has spread beyond the uterus.
- Stage III. The cancer has spread to the pelvic wall or the lower third of the vagina.
- Stage IV. Cancer has spread to the bladder, rectum or other organs.

Treatment

When cells that may lead to cancer are found, they can be removed, frozen or treated with meds before they turn into cancer. When you treat this cancer in the early stages, it helps stop the spread to other parts of your body.

- Surgery. If the cancer is at a later stage, doctors may need to perform surgery to take out the uterus. After surgery, radiation may be needed.
- Chemotherapy. Meds are either put into your vein or taken as pills. They target and kill cancer cells. HIV meds improve a person's response to this treatment. Chemo has side effects and can make you feel very weak. Some chemo meds make cancer cells respond better to radiation.
- Radiation. This uses high-energy rays such as X-rays to kill cancer cells and shrink tumors. It

is beamed through the body in the area where the cancer was found. This kills cancer with high-energy beams. The beam is focused on the area where the cancer was found. It may burn the skin where it is focused.

Women who have cervical cancer who also have CD4 counts of 500 or more do better than women whose CD4 counts are lower. There is a high chance the cancer will return in women with CD4 counts of less than 50. Take your HIV meds every day to keep your CD4 count high.

Prevention

Pap smears will check for signs of this cancer. When it is found early, the treatment works better. Women with HIV should have Pap smears every six months in the first year of HIV diagnosis. After that, you may have tests once per year. If the results are normal, Pap smears can be done once a year. Your doctor may also test for HPV. HIV meds help the body's immune system fight HPV. Women under the age of 26 can get a vaccine to prevent HPV.

For more information

Contact your Registered Nurse Care Manager, or call Positive Healthcare's Nurse Advice Line at: (800) 797-1717.

