

What Can I Do to Reduce My Risk of Cervical Cancer?

The most important thing you can do to help prevent cervical cancer is to get vaccinated early and have regular screening tests.

HPV Vaccine

The [HPV vaccine](#) protects against the [types of HPV](#) that most often cause cervical, vaginal, and vulvar cancers.

- HPV vaccination is recommended for preteens aged 11 to 12 years, but can be given starting at age 9.
- HPV vaccine also is recommended for everyone through age 26 years, if they are not vaccinated already.
- HPV vaccination is not recommended for everyone older than age 26 years. However, some adults age 27 through 45 years who are not already vaccinated may decide to get the HPV vaccine after speaking with their doctor about their risk for new HPV infections and the possible benefits of vaccination. HPV vaccination in this age range provides less benefit, as more people have already been exposed to HPV.

If vaccination is started before age 15, a two-dose schedule is recommended, with the doses given 6 to 12 months apart. For people who start the series after their 15th birthday, the vaccine is given in a series of three shots.

HPV vaccination prevents new HPV infections, but does not treat existing infections or diseases. This is why the HPV vaccine works best when given before any exposure to HPV. You should get screened for cervical cancer regularly, even if you received an HPV vaccine.

Screening Tests

Two [screening tests](#) can help prevent cervical cancer or find it early—

- The Pap test (or Pap smear) looks for *precancers*, cell changes on the cervix that might become cervical cancer if they are not treated appropriately.
- The HPV test looks for the virus ([human papillomavirus](#)) that can cause these cell changes.

Both tests can be done in a doctor's office or clinic. If you have a low income or do not have health insurance, you may be able to get free or low-cost screening tests through CDC's National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program. [Find out if you qualify.](#)

More Steps to Help Prevent Cervical Cancer

These things may also help lower your risk for cervical cancer—

- [Don't smoke.](#)
- Use condoms during sex.*
- Limit your number of sexual partners.

*HPV infection can occur in both male and female genital areas that are covered or protected by a latex condom, as well as in areas that are not covered. While the effect of condoms in preventing HPV infection is unknown, condom use has been associated with a lower rate of cervical cancer.