

PEP Talk

Pinellas County Health Department • January 2009

Know the Facts and Protect Yourself from Cervical Cancer January is Cervical Health Awareness Month

Cervical cancer is currently the second-leading cause of cancer death among women worldwide. The American Cancer Society estimated that more than 9,000 women would be diagnosed with the disease last year and more than 3,000 would die from it in the United States alone.

The good news is that most cases of cervical cancer can be prevented! From the Pap test to the HPV vaccine, cervical cancer can be prevented.

Facts About Cervical Cancer and HPV



■ **Cervical cancer is cancer of the cervix.** The cervix is the lower part of the uterus that connects to the vagina. Abnormal cells can develop in the lining of the cervix. If they're not found early and treated, these abnormal cells can

become pre-cancerous and then cancer.

■ **Almost every case (99.7%) of cervical cancer is caused by HPV,** or human papillomavirus, a very common type of virus that spreads easily. Most of the time, people who are infected with HPV do not know they have it.

■ **Eighty percent of all women** will have been infected with HPV by the time they are 50 years old.

Ways to Prevent Cervical Cancer & HPV

■ **Educate yourself.** Knowledge is power. Ask your doctor or healthcare provider for more information about cervical cancer and HPV.

■ **Screen regularly.** Get regular Pap tests and HPV tests. The Pap test can detect cervical changes early before they turn into cancer. Check with your doctor



or health provider to find out how often you should have a Pap test and HPV test.

■ **Limit the number of sexual partners you have.** Studies have shown that women who have many sexual partners increase their risk for cervical cancer by increasing their risk of developing HPV.

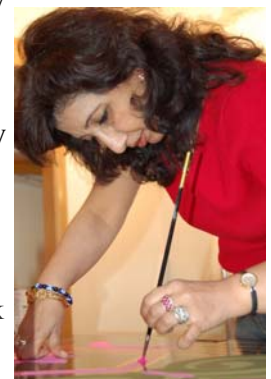
■ **Lower your risk.** The only way you can totally protect yourself against HPV is to avoid any sexual activity that involves genital contact. If you are sexually active, use a condom.

■ **Get the HPV vaccine.** If you are under 27, you may be eligible to receive the HPV vaccine, Gardasil, which prevents high risk strains of HPV in women. The

vaccine is most effective when given to young women before they become sexually active.

For this reason, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the HPV vaccine for 11- and 12-year-old girls and for girls and women age 13 through 26 who have not yet been vaccinated or completed the vaccine series.

For more information, please contact the Pinellas County Health Department or your regular health provider.



Our Breast and Cervical Cancer Screening Program provides free breast and cervical cancer screening exams – including mammograms, pap tests, pelvic exams and clinical breast exams – to women who are 50 to 64 years of age (low income, uninsured or under-insured). Please call (727) 824-6917 to make an appointment.

Take Control, Act Early, Get Enough Folic Acid

January is Birth Defects Prevention Month

One in 33 babies is born with a birth defect.

Many people believe that birth defects only happen to other people. But birth defects can and do happen in any family. About 120,000 babies in the U.S. each year have birth defects. Not all birth defects can be prevented. But there are things you



can do to increase your chance of having a healthy baby. Remember that about half of all pregnancies are unplanned. This means many birth defects happen very early in pregnancy, sometimes before a woman even knows she is pregnant.

One very simple step you can take to increase your chance of having a healthy baby is to be sure to get enough folic acid in your diet, both before and during your pregnancy.

The Basics

Folic acid is a vitamin that can help prevent certain birth defects. Women should aim to get 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day. There are two easy ways to do this:

1. Eat breakfast cereal that has 100 percent of the daily value of folic acid. Some examples are Total, Smart Start, Life, or Cheerios Plus.

2. Take a vitamin with folic acid. You can take a small pill that contains only folic acid or take a multivitamin.

Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding need even more folic acid.

If you are pregnant, talk with your doctor, nutritionist or health provider about folic acid.

The Benefits

Folic acid can prevent birth defects of the baby's brain or spine if you get enough of it *before* and *during* pregnancy. You need folic acid during the first few weeks, often before you know you are pregnant. That's why it's important to get enough folic acid every day,



even if you are not planning to get pregnant.

Take Action!

It's easy to get the folic acid you need. Just eat a bowl of cereal with folic acid or take a vitamin every day.



Check the Label

When you go to the grocery store, find foods with folic acid in them. You can find folic acid in fortified foods like cereal, enriched bread, pasta, and other grains. Check the label!

Make it Easy to Remember

If you take a vitamin, take it at the same time every day. Try taking it when you brush your teeth in the morning or with your breakfast. Leave the vitamin bottle on the kitchen or bathroom counter where you will see it.



Eat Healthy

A healthy diet includes food with folate (another type of folic acid). In addition to eating cereal that has folic acid or taking a vitamin, it is important for you to eat foods with folate, such as:

- Asparagus
- Spinach
- Orange juice
- Beans



Want to do more?

Here are some other important things you can do to help reduce the risk of birth defects:

- Avoid alcohol, tobacco, and street drugs.
- Keep your hands clean by washing them often with soap and water to prevent infections.
- See a health care professional regularly.
- Eat a healthy, balanced diet.
- Avoid eating raw or undercooked meat.

For more information, please contact the Pinellas County Health Department or your regular health provider.



PEP Talk is a publication of the Pinellas County Health Department
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While You Are Pregnant:

- Keep up with your good health habits!
- Get early prenatal care and go to every one of your appointments.