

National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program (NBCCEDP)

For more than 20 years, CDC's National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program (NBCCEDP) has provided low-income, uninsured, and underserved women access to timely breast and cervical cancer screening and diagnostic services.

Five main types of cancer affect a woman's reproductive organs: cervical, ovarian, uterine, vaginal, and vulvar. As a group, they are referred to as *gynecologic cancers*. Each gynecologic cancer is unique, with different signs, symptoms, and *risk factors* (things that may increase your chance of getting cancer).

All women are at risk for gynecologic cancers, and risk increases with age. You can lower your risk for some of these cancers. When gynecologic cancers are found early, treatment works best.

CDC promotes awareness of gynecologic cancers through its national awareness campaign, *Inside Knowledge: Get the Facts About Gynecologic Cancer*.

CDC's National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program provides breast and cervical cancer screenings and diagnostic services to low-income, uninsured, and underinsured women across the United States. Find out if you qualify.

There is no way to know for sure if you will get a gynecologic cancer. That's why it is important to pay attention to your body and know what is normal for you, so you can recognize the warning signs or symptoms of gynecologic cancer.

If you have vaginal bleeding that is unusual for you, talk to a doctor right away. You should also see a doctor if you have any other warning signs that last for two weeks or longer and are not normal for you. Symptoms may be caused by something other than cancer, but the only way to know is to see a doctor.

Signs and symptoms are not the same for everyone and each gynecologic cancer (cervical, ovarian, uterine, vaginal, and vulvar cancers) has its own signs and symptoms.

SYMPTOMS	Cervical Cancer	Ovarian Cancer	Uterine Cancer	Vaginal Cancer	Vulvar Cancer
Abnormal vaginal bleeding or discharge	●	●	●	●	○
Feeling full too quickly or difficulty eating	○	●	○	○	○
Pelvic pain or pressure	○	●	●	○	○
More frequent or urgent need to urinate and/or constipation	○	●	○	●	○
Bloating	○	●	○	○	○
Abdominal or back pain	○	●	○	○	○
Itching, burning, pain, or tenderness of the vulva	○	○	○	○	●
Changes in vulva color or skin, such as a rash, sores, or warts	○	○	○	○	●

HPV Vaccine

Some gynecologic cancers are caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV), a very common sexually transmitted infection. Vaccines protect against the HPV types that most often cause cervical, vaginal, and vulvar cancers. It is recommended for 11- and 12-year-old girls and boys. (Note: The vaccine can be given beginning at age 9.) It also can be given to females or males who are 13–26 who did not get any or all of the shots when they were younger. Ideally, girls and boys

should get three doses of this vaccine before their first sexual contact. If you or someone you care about is in this age range, talk with a doctor about it.

Screening Tests



Gynecologic cancer comprehensive brochure

Screening is when a test is used to look for a disease before there are any symptoms. Cancer screening tests are effective when they can find disease early, which can lead to more effective treatment. (Diagnostic tests are used when a person has symptoms. The purpose of diagnostic tests is to find out, or diagnose, what is causing the symptoms. Diagnostic tests also may be used to check a person who is considered at high risk for cancer.)

Of all the gynecologic cancers, only cervical cancer has a screening test—the Pap test—that can find this cancer early, when treatment works best. The Pap test also helps prevent cervical cancer by finding *precancers*, cell changes on the cervix that might become cervical cancer if they are not treated appropriately. In addition to the Pap test, which is the main screening test for cervical cancer, a test called the *HPV test* looks for HPV infection. It can be used along with the Pap test for screening women aged 30 years and older. It also is used to provide more information when Pap test results are unclear for women aged 21 and older. Learn more about the Pap and HPV tests.

Since there is no simple and reliable way to screen for any gynecologic cancers except cervical cancer, it is especially important to recognize warning signs and learn if there are things you can do to reduce your risk. Talk with your doctor if you believe that you are at increased risk for gynecologic cancer. Ask what you might do to lower your risk and whether there are tests that you should have.

If your doctor says that you have a gynecologic cancer, ask to be referred to a *gynecologic oncologist*—a doctor who has been trained to treat cancers of a woman’s reproductive system. This doctor will work with you to create a treatment plan.

Types of Treatment

Gynecologic cancers are treated in several ways. It depends on the kind of cancer and how far it has spread. Treatments include surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation. Women with a gynecologic cancer often get more than one kind of treatment.

- **Surgery:** Doctors remove cancer tissue in an operation.
- **Chemotherapy:** Using 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:** Using high-energy rays (similar to X-rays) to kill the cancer.



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Different treatments may be provided by different doctors on your medical team.

- *Gynecologic oncologists* are doctors who have been trained to treat cancers of a woman's reproductive system.
- *Surgeons* are doctors who perform operations.
- *Medical oncologists* are doctors who treat cancer with medicine.
- *Radiation oncologists* are doctors who treat cancer with radiation.

Clinical Trials

Clinical trials use new treatment options to see if they are safe and effective. If you have cancer, you may want to take part. Visit the sites listed below for more information.

- NIH Clinical Research Trials and You (National Institutes of Health)
- Learn About Clinical Trials (National Cancer Institute)
- Search for Clinical Trials (National Cancer Institute)
- ClinicalTrials.gov (National Institutes of Health)

Complementary and Alternative Medicine

Complementary and alternative medicine are medicines and health practices that are not standard cancer treatments. Complementary medicine is used *in addition to* standard treatments, and alternative medicine is used *instead of* standard treatments. Meditation, yoga, and supplements like vitamins and herbs are some examples.

Many kinds of complementary and alternative medicine have not been tested scientifically and may not be safe. Talk to your doctor about the risks and benefits before you start any kind of complementary or alternative medicine.

Which Treatment Is Right for Me?

Choosing the treatment that is right for you may be hard. Talk to your cancer doctor about the treatment options available for your type and stage of cancer. Your doctor can explain the risks and benefits of each treatment and their side effects. *Side effects* are how your body reacts to drugs or other treatments.

Sometimes people get an opinion from more than one cancer doctor. This is called a “second opinion.” Getting a second opinion may help you choose the treatment that is right for you.