

January is Cervical Health Awareness month. Nearly 13,000 women in the United States are diagnosed with cervical cancer each year, but it is preventable with appropriate screening. Screening plays an important role in the detection and early treatment of cervical cancer. Cervical cancer usually develops slowly over time.

Before cancer appears in the cervix, there are abnormal cell changes that happen. Regular pap screenings can detect these changes so that these abnormal cells can be removed before they become cancerous. Cervical cancer can usually be cured if it is found and treated in the early stages. During the past decades, screenings have reduced deaths from cervical cancer with doctors able to find cancer early and treat it, or prevent it from ever developing.

HPV (human papilloma virus) is the main cause of cervical cancer in women. Screening for HPV can detect certain infections that can lead to cell changes and cancer. The HPV vaccine is recommended for all children ages 11 or 12, before they're exposed to the virus, which is when it works best.

All women 21 or older should be regularly screened for cervical cancer, even if you have had the HPV vaccine. Schedule your annual exam today and ask your provider for ways to reduce your cancer risk.