

HPV and Cervical Cancer -- Understanding the Connection

Human Papillomaviruses (HPVs) are a group of more than 100 related viruses. More than 30 of those viruses can be passed from one person to another – by both men and women – through sexual contact. In fact, so common are HPVs that at least half of sexually active people will get HPV at some time in their lives, and by the age of 50, more than 80 percent of women will have acquired a genital HPV infection.

Unfortunately, infection with HPV is often asymptomatic – meaning there is no externally-visible display of symptoms. Because of this, individuals are often unaware that they may be carrying – and transmitting – the virus. Fortunately, in most cases, the virus appears to cause

no health problems whatsoever, and generally resolves by itself within two years.

But there are some cases which do result in visible external symptoms, such as genital warts. While each of these can create significant discomfort, the greatest concern for

women regarding Human Papillomaviruses is the risk for infection of the cervix which, if undetected over many years, can lead to cervical cancer.

Let's look a little more closely. Several types of HPV are referred to as "low-risk" viruses because they rarely cause lesions that develop into cancer. Likewise, the types that are more likely to lead to the development of cancer are referred to as "high-risk."

Both high-risk and low-risk types of HPV can cause the growth of abnormal cells, but only the high-risk types of HPV lead to cancer. Specifically, HPV types 16 and 18 together cause about 70 percent of cervical cancers.*

In the absence of clear symptoms, often the only way to know if one has an HPV infection is to have a direct test for the virus. For women, this is typically performed

right from the Pap test container or by using an additional swab at the time of the Pap test. In most women, the cells in the cervix return to normal after the body's immune system destroys the HPV infection. However, in some women, the HPV infection remains and causes changes in the body's cells. If these abnormal cells are not found and treated, they may become cancerous.

Because signs of an HPV infection may appear weeks, months or years after the first infection, it is essential for women to have routine pelvic exams.

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Twenty-four million Americans may have the human papillomavirus (HPV), yet more than 76 percent of women in the United States have never heard of this sexually transmitted virus which causes virtually 100 percent of all cervical cancers.



Source: National Cancer Institute



Regular Pap screening beginning at age 21 or within 3 years of the beginning of sexual activity can detect problems related to HPV infection before cancer develops.

Prevention is the Key

Prevention of HPV is a key factor in the prevention of cervical cancer. Not having any sexual contact is an absolute way to prevent HPV. However, for most adults, complete abstinence is unrealistic, so other means of prevention and risk reduction should be followed. Preventing HPV includes the same recommendations as for prevention of other sexually transmitted diseases, meticulous condom use by all sexually active individuals who are not in long-term monogamous relationships.

The HPV vaccine is another effective means of preventing HPV. Although it doesn't protect against all strains of HPV, it does provide protection against the four strains of HPV that are most commonly associated with cervical cancer and genital warts. The FDA approved the use of Gardasil, the HPV vaccine, in 2006. The target age for the vaccine is age 11 through 26, but can be given as early as 9 years of age. The goal is to vaccinate girls before they become sexually active and become exposed to HPV. It protects against two strains that are known to cause cervical cancer in women and two strains that are responsible for genital warts. The vaccine is given in three doses over six months:

- 1st dose: now – or at a date you and your healthcare provider choose
- 2nd dose: 2 months after the 1st dose
- 3rd dose: 6 months after the 1st dose

The HPV vaccine can be given at the same time as other vaccines. The decision as to whether or not to receive the HPV vaccine should be carefully evaluated - speak to your healthcare provider about whether or not the vaccine is right *for you*.



This October, members of the Sussex County Cancer Coalition will also be discussing lung cancer and particularly it's effects on women and their families. Attend the free "Town Day" activities to learn more...

- Byram Day: October 4th, 12:00 noon - 4:00 pm at C.O. Johnson Field on Roseville Road
- Lafayette Day: October 18th, 11:00 am - 4:00 pm at Lafayette School on Beaver Run Road
- Sussex: Harvest Festival on October 25th, 10:00 am - 4:00 pm on Main Street, Sussex

Through this past spring and summer, Coalition members shared essential health information with over 650 residents!

Campaign Honors Survivors and Promotes Awareness

In recognition of October as Breast Cancer Awareness Month, the Sussex County Cancer Coalition has partnered with Project Self Sufficiency for the 'Tie a Ribbon' campaign, to help increase breast cancer awareness throughout the county. The campaign, developed by the **Susan G Komen for the Cure** foundation, provides a visual opportunity to highlight breast health during the month of October.

Through October 30th, pink ribbons will be tied onto trees and lampposts along main streets or thoroughfares in participating municipalities in Sussex County.

In addition, look for educational information about breast health in libraries throughout Sussex County. Posters and handouts will correlate the 'Tie a Ribbon' campaign with take home information on self exam, mammograms, and screenings.

Pink ribbons have become an internationally recognized sign of courage, support and hope for a cure. Displaying them during Breast Cancer Awareness Month is a wonderful way to encourage residents of Sussex County to stand together against this disease.

Preventing Lymphedema, Post-mastectomy

After a mastectomy, some women may experience something called 'lymphedema'. Lymphedema (LIMF-eh-DEE-ma) is a condition in which fluid collects in the arm, causing it to swell. Lymph vessels, much like blood vessels, run all through the body. They carry lymph fluid, cells and other material. When lymph nodes are removed from the armpit, some of the lymph vessels can become blocked. This may keep fluid from leaving the arm and cause the arm to swell (edema).

It is still not clear why some breast cancer survivors develop lymphedema and others do not. It is also not clear which strategies work best to prevent lymphedema. However, it is generally believed that injury or infection to the arm can trigger lymphedema. So it is best to take steps to reduce the risk of injury or infection. Although the tips below have not been proven in clinical trials, they may work for some people.

- Treat infections of the affected arm and hand immediately.
- Wear gloves when doing house or garden work.
- Keep the affected hand well moisturized.
- Use the unaffected arm when having blood drawn, getting injections or having blood pressure taken.
- Avoid lifting or carrying heavy bags, purses or other objects with the at-risk arm.
- Protect the arm from sunburn (use sunscreen and protective clothing) and avoid excess heat such as saunas, hot baths or tanning.
- Do not cut cuticles.
- Use insect repellent when outdoors.
- Keep skin clean.
- Avoid wearing tight jewelry or clothing and wear a padded bra strap.
- Use an electric razor, not a blade, to shave the underarm.
- Avoid any type of injury, including scratches and bruises, to the at-risk arm.
- When flying in an airplane, wear a compression sleeve and drink lots of fluids during the flight.
- Rest the at-risk arm in an elevated position (above the heart or shoulder).
- If an infection or injury does develop, it should be examined by your health care provider right away and treated as indicated.

Source: Susan G Komen for the Cure

REMEMBER THESE IMPORTANT BREAST HEALTH TIPS:

- Begin self-breast exams at age 20, and schedule a clinical breast exam
- Begin annual mammograms at age 40
- Speak with your healthcare provider to assess your personal risks

For Upcoming Health Screenings:
**Sussex County Environmental and Public Health
Services 973-579-0570 x1212
Hopatcong Health Department
973-770-1200 x146
NJCEED at Saint Clare's Hospital, Sussex
973-702-2740**



Cancer Coalition members participate in 'Relay for Life', an event sponsored in May by the American Cancer Society

Report Yields Three Clear Cancer Prevention Guidelines

The American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) has published a comprehensive review of research on cancer prevention. The document, Food, Nutrition, Physical Activity, and the Prevention of Cancer: A Global Perspective, presents evidence from 7,000 scientific studies and was developed over a five year period by a team of researchers and medical experts. Some of the most important information in the 517-page document is summarized for the public in a free brochure.

The new brochure, "**Guidelines for Cancer Prevention**", clearly explains changes you can make in your daily life that can help keep you healthy and help prevent cancer disease. These recommendations are grouped into three basic guidelines: food, physical activity, and weight management.

The report found convincing evidence that body fat is directly linked to six types of cancer, including colorectal and post-menopausal breast cancer. It recommends that people stay lean and suggests ways for stopping weight gain. For the first time, these recommendations are supported by strong, scientific evidence.



Each Change Has Double Effects

For curtailing weight gain, which in turn will curtail cancer risk, the report advocates increased physical activity and a diet based on low energy-dense foods such as vegetables, fruits, and beans. A diet featuring plant foods also reduces cancer disease risk directly by supplying the body with plant compounds that are needed to prevent or repair cell damage. So, becoming more active and eating wisely carries a double benefit when it comes to knocking out cancer.

The ACIR report also discusses evidence showing that reduction of alcohol and red meat (particularly processed meat) consumption is an important strategy for reducing cancer risk. Although the report does not recommend eliminating alcohol and red meat entirely, it does call for reducing the amounts that Americans ordinarily consume. These lifestyle changes may present challenges for people whose lifelong habits have included a significant amount of

alcohol and red meat in their diets. However, the evidence clearly shows that people who make a serious effort to change the way they eat and live can reduce their chances of getting cancer as well as other chronic diseases.

The brochure, "**Guidelines for Cancer Prevention**", can be viewed online at www.aicr.org or ordered by contacting AICR at 1-800-843-8114.

WHO WE ARE

The Sussex County Cancer Coalition is composed of many local and national community organizations. The Coalition's focus, through public education, is to intensify awareness and reduce the morbidity/mortality rates of cancer disease in the county. Learn more about the Cancer Coalition and our partners at <http://www.sussexagainstcancer.org> or by calling 973-579-0570 x 1212.

Our Mission is to utilize a diverse partnership of community members and resource agencies working collaboratively to encourage cancer prevention behaviors and increase early cancer detection in Sussex County residents.



The Sussex County Cancer Coalition is made possible by a grant to the Sussex County Department of Environmental and Public Health Services and from the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services' Office of Cancer Control and Prevention. The mission of the Sussex County Cancer Coalition is to implement the New Jersey Comprehensive Cancer Control Plan in Sussex County. For more information on Comprehensive Cancer Control in New Jersey, please visit: www.njcancer.gov.