

Cervical Cancer - Overview [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 04/2014

ON THIS PAGE: You will find some basic information about this disease and the parts of the body it may affect. This is the first page of Cancer.Net's Guide to Cervical Cancer. To see other pages, use the menu on the side of your screen. Think of that menu as a roadmap to this full guide.

About the cervix

Cervical cancer starts in a woman's cervix, which is the lower, narrow part of the uterus. The uterus holds the growing fetus during pregnancy. The cervix connects the lower part of the uterus to the vagina and, with the vagina, forms the birth canal.

About precancer and cervical cancer

Cervical cancer begins when normal cells on the surface of the cervix change and grow uncontrollably, forming a mass called a tumor. A tumor can be cancerous or benign. A cancerous tumor is malignant, meaning it can spread to other parts of the body. A benign tumor means the tumor will not spread.

At first, the changes in a cell are abnormal, not cancerous. Researchers believe, however, that some of these abnormal changes are the first step in a series of slow changes that can lead to cancer. Some of the abnormal cells go away without treatment, but others can become cancerous. This phase of the disease is called dysplasia, which is an abnormal growth of cells. The abnormal cells, sometimes called precancerous tissue, need to be removed to keep cancer from developing. Often, the precancerous tissue can be removed or destroyed without harming healthy tissue, but in some cases, a hysterectomy (removal of the uterus and cervix) is needed to prevent cervical cancer.

Treatment of a lesion, which is a precancerous area, depends on the following factors:

- The size of the lesion and the type of changes that have occurred in the cells
- If the woman wants to have children in the future
- The woman's age
- The woman's general health
- The preference of the woman and her doctor

If the precancerous cells change into true cancer cells and spread deeper into the cervix or to other tissues and organs, then the disease is called cervical cancer.

There are two main types of cervical cancer, named for the type of cell where the cancer started. Other types of cervical cancer are rare.

- Squamous cell carcinoma, which makes up about 80% to 90% of all cervical cancers
- Adenocarcinoma, which makes up 10% to 20% of all cervical cancers

Looking for More of an Overview?

If you would like additional introductory information, explore these related items. Please note these links take you to other sections on Cancer.Net:

- [ASCO Answers Fact Sheet](#) [3]: Read a one-page fact sheet (available as a PDF) that offers an easy-to-print introduction to this type of cancer.
- [Cancer.Net En Español](#) [4]: Read about cervical cancer in Spanish. [Infórmase sobre cancer de cuello uterino en español](#) [4].

To continue reading this guide, use the menu on the side of your screen to select another section.

Links:

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/cervical-cancer/overview>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>

[3] http://www.cancer.net/sites/cancer.net/files/asco_answers_cervical.pdf

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/es/node/18050>