

Cervical Cancer

1500 Canadian women developed cervical cancer in 2023.¹

66% of Canadian women diagnosed with cervical cancer will survive at least 5 years.¹

Importance of HPV

Cervical cancer is very closely linked with human papillomavirus (HPV) infection. HPV is a group of infections made up of over one-hundred different viral strains. Some strains are more commonly associated with cold sores or genital warts while others have been found to increase your risk of cancer. All forms of HPV are spread through sexual contact and studies estimate that over 75% of sexually active adults will develop at least one HPV infection during their lifetime.²

The best way to mitigate your risk of HPV infection is to get vaccinated. HPV vaccines are offered to all school-aged children across Canada although many adults will be eligible for vaccination if requested.

HPV16 and HPV18 are the most common high-risk strains, accounting for 70% of cervical cancer cases.²

What is cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer occurs when the cells that make up the cervix undergo a malignant change. The cervix forms the lower end of a woman's uterus, or 'womb'. This narrow passage connects the uterus with the vaginal canal and plays a vital role in menstruation, pregnancy, fertility and childbirth.

The cells that make up the cervix are very adaptable – this important feature allows the cervix to 'open' and thin during childbirth. The dynamic nature of cervical cells increases the risk of malignant changes in the cervix.

It is very common for cervical cells to undergo abnormal changes – this is usually picked up on a pap test and often improves without any intervention. Sometimes these changes are more severe and deemed at a higher risk of cancer development. In these cases, the abnormal cervical cells are aptly labelled 'pre-cancerous'. If left untreated, these precancerous cells can undergo a 'malignant transformation' and further progress into cancer.

It's important to note that these cancerous cervical changes happen very slowly, often progressing over years or even decades before symptoms arise. This is why it is so important to keep up with your regular pap test/HPV screening (see next page); if cervical changes are detected early, not only is the cancer treatable but often it's curable as well.

Symptoms

Cervical cancer is often asymptomatic in its early stages.

Abnormal vaginal bleeding

- Changes in menstruation
- Bleeding in-between periods
- Bleeding or spotting after menopause

Abnormal vaginal discharge

- Foul-smelling or 'pus-like'
- Blood tinged

Pain

- Pain during sex
- Painful urination or bowel movements
- Pain or pressure in the pelvis or abdomen

Diagnosis

Usually, diagnosis of cervical cancer begins with an abnormal pap test result. Following this, further initial testing will likely include an HPV test, a colposcopy, a camera test similar to an endoscopy that helps visualize the cervix, and biopsy of cervical tissue.

Pap Test

A Pap test is a part of the routine national cervical cancer screening offered to women. Guidance on cervical screening varies by province starting at age 21 or 25 and repeated every 2-3 years until age 65 to 70.³ The attitude towards pap tests is changing, and new HPV self-tests are currently being rolled out in certain provinces.⁴

These take-home tests include a self-administered vaginal swab that are sent away to a lab for HPV testing. Speak to your care provider about which test is recommended in your province. For more information on Pap test results, see our Pap test fact sheet.

How can Teladoc Health help?

If you think you are due for a Pap test or would like to learn more about HPV self-tests, our Find a Doctor service can locate a general practitioner or gynecologist who is available to help you.

If you have been diagnosed with cervical cancer and would like a second opinion on treatment options, our [Expert Medical Opinion](#) service can locate a specialist to review your case.

Our [Mental Health Navigator](#) services can help you find mental health resources in your community to support you through your cancer journey. Mental Health Navigator assessments can also support individuals who are looking to address any secondary mental health symptoms alongside their cancer journey.

This guide is not meant to provide medical advice or service and should not be construed as the professional advice of Teladoc Health. As such, Teladoc Health does not guarantee or assume responsibility for the correctness of the information or its applicability regarding any specific factual situation. Personal health problems should be brought to the attention of physicians and appropriate health care professionals.

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- 1 Canadian Cancer Society / Société canadienne du cancer. "Canadian Cancer Statistics." Canadian Cancer Society, Canadian Cancer Society, cancer.ca/en/research/cancer-statistics/canadian-cancer-statistics. Accessed 5 Jan. 2024.
- 2 Canadian Cancer Society / Société canadienne du cancer. "Human Papillomavirus." Canadian Cancer Society, Canadian Cancer Society, cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/reduce-your-risk/get-vaccinated/human-papillomavirus-hpv. Accessed 5 Jan. 2024.
- 3 "Diagnosis of Cervical Cancer." Canadian Cancer Society, Canadian Cancer Society, cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/cancer-types/cervical/diagnosis. Accessed 5 Jan. 2024.
- 4 "HPV Testing." Canadian Partnership Against Cancer, Canadian Partnership Against Cancer, 20 Sept. 2023, www.partnershipagainstcancer.ca/topics/cervical-cancer-screening-in-canada-2021-2022/modalities-for-cervical-screening/hpv-testing/.
- 5 Canadian Cancer Society / Société canadienne du cancer. "Pap Test." Canadian Cancer Society, Canadian Cancer Society, cancer.ca/en/treatments/tests-and-procedures/pap-test. Accessed 5 Jan. 2024.

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