Frequently Asked Questions about Cervical Cancer:

1. What is cervical cancer?
Cervical cancer occurs when abnormal cells develop in the tissue of the cervix. The cervix (also known as the neck of the uterus) is located in the lower part of the uterus that connects to the vagina.

This type of cancer does not form suddenly but gradually turns normal cells into precancerous cells. This process of normal cells going to abnormal cell growth takes a matter of several years but sometimes in less than a year.

Pre –cancer, if abnormal cells are detected, cervical cancer can be prevented. If cervical cancer is detected at an early stage it is highly curable.

Cervical cancer is caused by certain types of the Human Papilomavirus.

2. What is HPV?
Human Papilomavirus (HPV) is a virus that causes cervical cancer in women. There are over 100 different types of HPV known. Not all HPV types cause cervical cancer. Of those, 30-40 types of HPV can be transmitted through genital contact. Four of those types account for over 70% of the cases of cervical cancer. Approximately 80% of women will have been infected with genital HPV by the time they are 50. Some forms of HPV cause genital warts but these do not cause cervical cancer.

It is important to note that it can take up to ten years for abnormal cells to appear after HPV infection. It is important to be screened even if an individual is not currently sexually active.

3. What are the symptoms for cervical cancer?
Generally, cervical cancer and pre-cancer do not have any symptoms.

Cervical cancer symptoms are unnoticed because they are like so many other ailments and vary from person to person. When symptoms become present, it is usually in more advanced stages of cervical cancer. Common symptoms are abnormal bleeding, unusual heavy discharge, pelvic pain, pain during urination, and bleeding between regular menstrual periods (irritations on the cervix).

4. What are the risk factors for cervical cancer?
- The principal risk factor for cervical cancer is a high risk HPV infection that does not clear on its own.
- Not being screened regularly with a pap test with or without an HPV test
- History of more than one sexual partner or having a partner with more than one sexual partner
- Starting sexual activity at a young age
- Lack of condom use
- Sexually transmitted infections
- Impaired immune system
- Poor diet
- Hormonal factors
- Tobacco use
• Certain medications (chemotherapy, steroids, anti rejection drugs after transplantation)

5. **Can cervical cancer be cured?**
   If detected early it can be cured.

6. **How can I do to decrease my risk of getting cervical cancer?**
   - Limit the number of sexual partners
   - Get screened regularly
   - Follow up any abnormal PAP test results
   - Don’t smoke cigarettes

7. **How can I decrease my risk of getting cervical cancer:**
   There is a vaccine available to young girls from age 9-26.
   Recommendations are that females should get the vaccine before they become sexually active. Studies have shown that the vaccine is found to be extremely effective in preventing the disease in four types of HPV (types 6, 11, 16, and 18).
   The vaccine is less effective if young women are already exposed to one type of HPV and the vaccine does not treat existing infections. The vaccine is given in a 3 dose shot every 2 months until the last dose.
   The first shot is the most important and effective.

8. **Is having an abnormal Pap test serious?**
   Hearing that you have an abnormal Pap test may make you worry that you might have cervical cancer. The good news is that you probably do not. Cervical cancer is a relatively rare condition. Most abnormal Pap results are not cancer. It may be comforting to know that abnormal Pap test results are not uncommon. About 1 in every 20 Pap test results are considered abnormal.

9. **My Pap test was "abnormal," what happens now?**
   If your report found inflammation or infection, you may need to return to the clinic to be examined so that your healthcare provider can determine what is causing your abnormality. Sometimes you can be treated without another examination based on the abnormal Pap smear report.
   If your Pap smear report indicated atypical cells, you may need a repeat Pap smear, a test for human papillomavirus or you may need an examination by colposcopy. Your healthcare provider will let you know what type of additional test may be best for you.
   If you are a postmenopausal woman not taking estrogen replacement treatment, you may be asked to take estrogen and return for another Pap smear in one month.

   If dysplasia or a squamous intraepithelial lesion was found, the next step may involve taking a closer look at the cervix using a colposcope. A colposcope is like a microscope positioned outside the vagina that magnifies the cervix. A vinegar solution is applied to the cervix which turns abnormal tissue white. A white region contrasts with the rest of your cervix which is pink. By using a colposcope, we can find out the source of the abnormal cells that were seen on your Pap smear by taking a biopsy (a tiny sample of tissue). If your tests show only a mild abnormality, your healthcare provider may recommend close follow-up with Pap smears in within 6 months because often your body overcome mildly abnormal cells.
   For more severe abnormal cells, treatment to destroy the abnormal area is
recommended. In the rare event that your Pap smear reported carcinoma, your health care provider will discuss further evaluation and treatment options with you.

Additional Questions:

10. **Is there a genetic relationship for Latina(s) to get cervical cancer?**
   No. There is no genetic relationship for people of any race/ethnicity for developing cervical cancer. Cervical cancer is not like ovarian or breast cancer, where having a relative increase your chances. It is primarily cause by HPV.

11. **Is cancer of the Uterus the same as cervical cancer?**
   No, cancer of the uterus is a different type of cancer.

12. **Can you live with HPV?**
   No, your body will produce antibodies against the virus but if the virus persists, then it will lead to abnormal cell growth then cervical cancer.

13. **Can men get HPV?**
   Yes, men and women can acquire HPV during sexual activity. Our understanding of HPV infection in men is evolving, however we do know that most immune competent men will clear the infection without any long term consequences. Condyloma is the result of exposure to specific non-cancer causing HPV types (6 & 11). Likewise a variety of cancers of the oral, esophageal, anal and even penile cancers have been linked to oncogenic HPV infection. These cancers are relatively rare.

14. **What is a PAP test?**
   A PAP test is a procedure specific for cervical cancer screening test which does not detect other types of cancer. It is a procedure in which cells are scraped from the cervical region and are examined under a microscope. It is used to detect any changes in cell growth over time. This test is largely responsible for reducing the mortality due to cervical cancer by 70% in the last 50 years.

15. **Can you detect HPV with a PAP test?**
   A PAP test is a procedure that is designed to catch the changes of abnormal cells but not HPV.

16 **Is there a test for HPV?**
   YES, HPV infections of the cervix (the lower part of the uterus, located at the top of the vagina) do not produce symptoms that patients can see or feel. The only way to know about an HPV infection of the cervix is to have a Pap test or cervical HPV test performed during a pelvic exam. A Pap showing dysplasia or intraepithelial neoplasia or cervical cancer almost always is a result of HPV infection.

17. **Is the HPV vaccine covered by insurance?**
   Some insurance companies may cover the cost of the vaccine and others do not.
18. Can you get Cervical Cancer without a cervix?
   To be diagnosed with cervical cancer, you must have a cervix.

   * taken from ascp.org