How is screening done?

- Two tests can be used for cervical cancer screening: A Pap test or an HPV test. One or both may be recommended based on your age and medical history.

- Schedule your Pap test, HPV test or both with your provider. During the exam, a metal or plastic device, called a speculum, is placed in your vagina to reach the cervix. Next, a small brush is used to collect a small sample of cells on your cervix. The cells are placed in a bottle and sent to the lab for testing to look at the cells and sometimes also for the presence of HPV.

- Pap tests usually do not hurt, but if you are scared, or if you had a bad experience with a Pap test exam before, please let your provider know. Your provider may be able to use a smaller speculum or help in some other way.

- As part of the exam, your provider may also examine your vagina, ovaries and uterus by placing his/her fingers in your vagina and feeling your lower belly.

Where can I get more information?

- **Cervical Cancer Home Page**
  National Cancer Institute:
  http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/types/cervical

- **Cervical Cancer Prevention (Patient)**
  National Cancer Institute:

- **Healthfinder.gov**
  Cervical Cancer Screening information:
  https://healthfinder.gov/search/?q=cervical

- **USPSTF**
  https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2697698

Here are some questions to ask your provider:

- How often do I need a Pap or HPV test or both?
- If my test is abnormal, how will I be contacted?
- Should I receive the HPV vaccine?
What is the cervix and how does a woman get cervical cancer?

- The cervix is a small, donut-shaped opening that connects from the lower part of the uterus to the top of the vagina. The cervix allows menstrual blood to leave the uterus during a woman's period, and allows sperm to enter the uterus during sex. During pregnancy the cervix stays closed, and then during labor the cervix opens to allow for the birth of the infant.

- The cells of the cervix are easily infected by the Human Papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is the main cause of cervical cancer. HPV can be spread from one person to another during sex. Condoms do NOT prevent the spread of HPV, because the virus is spread through skin contact not body fluids, but they do protect from other sexually transmitted infections.

- Cancer starts when cells grow out of control. Cancer starts in one place, but over time may spread to other parts of the body if it is not found early and treated.

- Changes to the cervix caused by HPV can be found by a Pap test. Most of the time, a woman's infection-fighting system can remove the virus from the body. Sometimes the virus stays in a woman's cervix and causes changes that may later become cancer if not removed. This process takes several years.

- The HPV vaccine may help women fight certain types of HPV, but not all.

- In countries where Pap tests are not done routinely, many women die from cervical cancer. In the United States, where most women get routine Pap tests, death from cervical cancer is uncommon.

How can I prevent cervical cancer?

- Get regular Pap and HPV tests as recommended.

- Get the HPV vaccine (Gardasil 9®) between the ages of 9 and 26. The HPV vaccine is a series of three shots, usually given over 6 months.

What is screening?

- Screening means looking for something when there are no signs that anything is wrong.

- If you are having any signs of concern such as bleeding during or after sex, bleeding in between periods, or irregular spotting the ages and screening intervals in this pamphlet do not apply. Please call your health care team to schedule a visit.

When should I begin cervical cancer screening?

- Start getting Pap tests at age 21. You should not get a Pap test for screening sooner than age 21 even if you started having sex as a teenager.

How often should I have cervical cancer screening?

- Get a Pap test every 3 years from age 21 to 29 years.

- When you are aged 30-65, you may decide to get a Pap test every 5 years if you are tested for the presence of HPV at the time of your Pap test, or you may get tested for HPV every 5 years, or may continue getting the Pap test by itself every 3 years. Discuss this with your provider.

- If you are older than 65 years (and had routine prior screening with negative results, or had uterus and cervix removed by surgery (a hysterectomy) because of a condition other than cervical cancer, you probably do not need to continue getting Pap tests. Discuss this with your provider.

- If your Pap test shows something that’s not normal, the timing of your next Pap test may change. Discuss this with your provider.