

## Prevention of Cervical Cancer

Humana Military Health Services (HMHS) is committed to providing our beneficiaries with information to prevent cervical cancer. This short article is intended to provide you, the beneficiary, with information to decrease your chances of getting this type of cancer.

In Puerto Rico, a study by Ana Patricia Ortiz, MPH, PhD, and others at the University of Puerto Rico compared the cancer incidence rates between Puerto Rico and the following population groups: United States, United States Hispanics, Texas, Texas Hispanics, New York and New York Hispanics. For cervical cancer, women in Puerto Rico experienced an increased risk from women in the United States. Puerto Rico Hispanic women also showed increased risks for breast and ovarian cancer. Comparison of the percentage changes showed that although cervical and ovarian cancers are *decreasing* in United States Hispanic women, both are *increasing* in Puerto Rico.

Pap test screening *can* detect changes in the cervix before cancer occurs.

The risk factors for cervical cancer may include:

- History of sexually transmitted infection
- No history of prior pap smears
- Having many sexual partners
- Early sexual activity
- History of tobacco use
- Dietary factors
- Low income
- Years of oral birth control use [the 'pill']
- Many pregnancies

The signs and symptoms of cervical cancer include:

- Blood tinged vaginal discharge
- Bleeding after sexual relations
- Any abnormal bleeding
- Increasing sense to urinate
- Abdominal pain
- Abdominal tenderness

The Centers for Disease Control recommend screening for cervical cancer every one to three years [dependent on negative laboratory results]. The following screening tips will provide more information for pap smear testing, to help prevent cervical cancer:

1. Begin screening 3 years after the beginning of sexual activity, *or*,
2. Begin screening at age 21, whichever occurs first
3. When you turn 30 and have had 3 normal Pap tests, then the test can be performed every 2 to 3 years; please check with your doctor to see if he/she agrees
4. If you have had a total hysterectomy, which includes the removal of the cervix, you may not need regularly scheduled exams; please check with your doctor to see if he/she agrees

Remember, early detection and treatment of this illness lowers your risk of more serious problems. Please call your doctor to schedule an appointment for this simple procedure!

For additional information regarding this topic, please go to:

<http://www.cdc.gov>

<http://www.cancer.org/docroot/home/index.asp>

<http://www.ahcpr.gov/clinic/3rduspstf/cervcan/cervcanrr.htm>

Sources:

*<http://www.ahcpr.gov/clinic/3rduspstf/cervcan/cervcanrr.htm>, accessed from the world wide web, January 2006.*

*Presentation "Trends in the incidence of breast, cervical and ovarian cancer in Puerto Ricans and US Hispanics: A comparative study", American Public Health Association 133rd Annual Meeting & Exposition, December 10-14, 2005, Philadelphia, PA.*

*Authors: Ana Patricia Ortiz, MPH, PhD, Department of Biostatistics and Epidemiology, University of Puerto Rico; Erick Suárez, MS, PhD, Department of Biostatistics and Epidemiology, University of Puerto Rico; and Graciela Noguerras, MPH, Puerto Rico Cancer Center, University of Puerto Rico.*

*<http://www.cdc.gov>, accessed from the world wide web, September 2005.*

*<http://www.cancer.org/docroot/home/index.asp>, accessed from the world wide web, September 2005.*