

January is a time when people ceremoniously lay aside the old in anticipation of the new. But Human Papillomavirus (HPV), which is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI) in the United States, may have followed you into the new year.

HPV affects females and males causing some cancers of the vulva, vagina, cervix, penis, anus, and oropharynx (back of the throat, including the base of the tongue and tonsils). According to the Centers for Disease Control, you can get HPV by having vaginal, anal, or oral sex with someone who has the virus. It is most commonly spread during vaginal or anal sex. It also spreads through close skin-to-skin touching during sex. A person with HPV can pass the infection to someone even when they have no signs or symptoms. If you are sexually active, you can get HPV, even if you have had sex with only one person. You also can develop symptoms years after having sex with someone who has the infection. This makes it hard to know when you first got it. In fact, most people with HPV do not know they have the infection. They never develop symptoms or health problems from it. Some people find out they have HPV when they get genital warts. Women may find out they have HPV when they get an abnormal Pap test result (during cervical cancer screening). Others may only find out after they've developed more serious problems from HPV such as cancers.

This article primarily focuses on cervical cancer with January being National Cervical Cancer Awareness Month. In general, HPV is thought to be responsible for more than 90% of cervical cancer averaging in 12,293 cases each year in the US. Per the National Institutes of Health, nearly all cases of cervical cancer are caused by persistent infection with high-risk types of HPV.

Pap tests and HPV screening are the best way to find cervical cancer in its earliest stages when treatment is most effective. Yet some women are not getting their cervical cancer screenings. A number of factors have been associated with lower rates of cervical cancer screening including low income, less education, not knowing that screening was needed and a lack of health insurance.

There is no reason for a woman not be screened and/or treated for cervical cancer. Most commercial insurances and Medicaid cover screening tests. Meanwhile, the Southeastern Ohio Breast and Cervical Cancer Project (BCCP), which is funded by the Ohio Department of Health and administered by the Noble County Health Department, can fund a pap test every three years, or Pap and HPV co-testing every five years. BCCP also can fund diagnostic (or advanced) testing for abnormal Pap/HPV results. To be eligible for cervical cancer screening and diagnostic services, a woman must be aged 21 years or older; have an income at or below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level (or \$40,770 for an individual); be uninsured or underinsured; be an Ohio resident.

Woman who are diagnosed with breast and/or cervical cancer (or cervical pre-cancerous conditions) and meet BCCP guidelines, may be eligible for a special type of Medicaid called BCCP Medicaid. Women enrolled in BCCP Medicaid receive full Medicaid benefits throughout the duration of their treatment.

For more information, please talk with your physician or call the Southeastern Ohio BCCP at 1-800-236-6253.



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