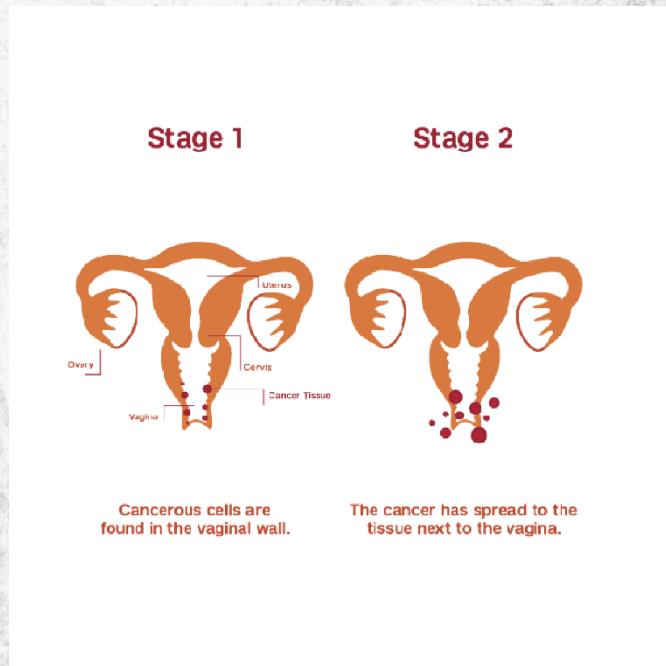


Vaginal cancer:



Vaginal cancer is a rare cancer that occurs in your vagina (the muscular tube that connects your uterus with your outer genitals). Vaginal cancer most commonly occurs in the cells that line the surface of your vagina, which is sometimes called the birth canal.

Symptoms:

There are often no symptoms of vaginal cancer, meaning it is advanced by the time a diagnosis is made. Therefore, regular checkups with a gynecologist are strongly recommended. Symptoms of vaginal cancer can include:

Bleeding outside of menstruation, sometimes after intercourse

Painful intercourse

Unusual discharge

A lump in the vagina

Constipation

Painful urination

A pain in the pelvic area

Causes:

It is still unknown what causes vaginal cancer, however, in general, cancer begins when healthy cells acquire a genetic mutation that turns normal cells into abnormal cells. The accumulating abnormal cells form a mass (tumor).

Types of vaginal cancer:

There are several types of vaginal cancer, which all affect different cells within the vagina:

Squamous cell carcinoma: This is the most common vaginal cancer, and it starts in the cells lining the vagina near the cervix

Adenocarcinoma: A cancer that begins in gland cells of the vagina. It usually affects women over 50.

Melanoma: A rarer type of vaginal cancer, melanoma usually occurs in the outer part of the vagina.

Sarcoma: A rare type of vaginal cancer, that starts within the walls of the vagina.

Risk factors:

Increasing age.

Atypical cells in the vagina called vaginal intraepithelial neoplasia

Early age at first intercourse



Smoking

HIV infection

Prevention:

Undergo the regular pelvic exams.

Ask your doctor about the HPV vaccine. Receiving a vaccination to prevent HPV infection may reduce your risk of vaginal cancer and other HPV-related cancers. Ask your doctor whether an HPV vaccine is appropriate for you.

Don't smoke.

Treatment:

Treatment will depend on the stage of the cancer is, which type of cells are affected, and a woman's age.

Earlier stage cancer can be treated with laser surgery. When caught early, vaginal cancer can often be successfully treated, and survival rates are high.

More advanced vaginal cancer is harder to treat so it is important to visit your doctor to report any symptoms as soon as you notice them. Treatment may involve surgery, radiation and chemotherapy. A doctor will stage the cancer, to see how advanced it is, and whether it has spread to other organs or the lymph nodes. These stages are called T (tumor), N (nodes), and if it has spread, or metastasized, M.

