

You can prevent cervical cancer



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If it weren't for a woman named Sandy, Brenda T. might have a very different story to tell.

Two years ago, when Brenda was 50 years old, she didn't have health insurance, and was going to a free clinic in Schenectady, New York. That's where she met Sandy, a women's health advocate. "Whenever I saw Sandy, she asked whether I'd had my Pap test," Brenda says. "She kept nagging me. So I finally did go."

Brenda, the mother of three and grandmother of two, learned she had cervical cancer. She needed surgery. "I was terrified. I was told that if I had been screened earlier, the cancer wouldn't be so bad that I needed a partial hysterectomy."

Even though cervical cancer can be prevented and treated successfully, every year about 12,000 women in the U.S. are diagnosed with it and 4,000 women die from it, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

But there is good news: you can prevent cervical cancer, with regular screening tests and follow-up. Two screening tests help prevent it or find it early. The Pap test (or Pap smear) looks for precancers—cell changes on the cervix that might become cancer if they are not treated. The HPV test looks for the virus (human papillomavirus) that causes most cervical cancers.

The Pap test is recommended for women between the ages of 21 and 65. If test results are normal, another Pap test may not be needed for three years. If you are 30 years old or older, you may choose to also have an HPV test along with the Pap test every five years. You and your doctor can decide what is right for you.

"If I could say anything to other women, it is to get checked for cervical cancer regularly," says Brenda. "If I hadn't gone when I did, who knows what condition I would be in? There are screening services out there, whether you have insurance or not!"

If you have a low income or do not have insurance, you may be eligible for free or low-cost cervical cancer screening through CDC's National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program.

"I'm happy and healthy now. I get checked regularly and make sure my daughter does, too," Brenda says. "When my grandkids are old enough, I want them to get the HPV vaccine—it can prevent cervical cancer. I'm proud to say I'm cancer-free and in great health. And I'm very thankful to Sandy for being so persistent. She may have saved my life!"

To learn more, call 1-800-CDC-INFO or visit www.cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/ for information on cervical cancer. For information on the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/nbccedp/>.

To learn about HPV vaccine, visit www.cdc.gov/hpv/vaccine.html. And check out CDC's *Inside Knowledge: Get the Facts About Gynecologic Cancer Campaign* at www.cdc.gov/cancer/knowledge/.