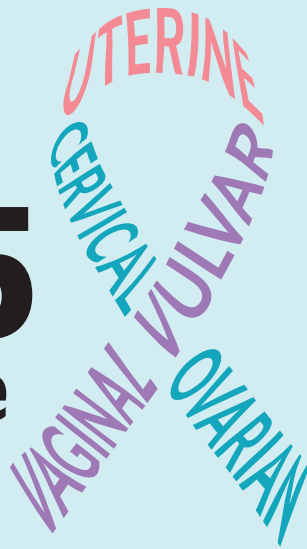


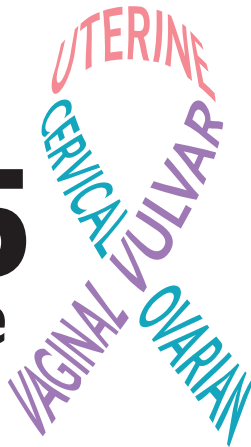
# Know the **BIG 5** and **Thrive**



**Gynecological** Cancer Awareness



# Know the **BIG 5** and Thrive



**ADVOCATE - EDUCATION - KNOW YOUR RISK - TALK TO YOUR PROVIDER**

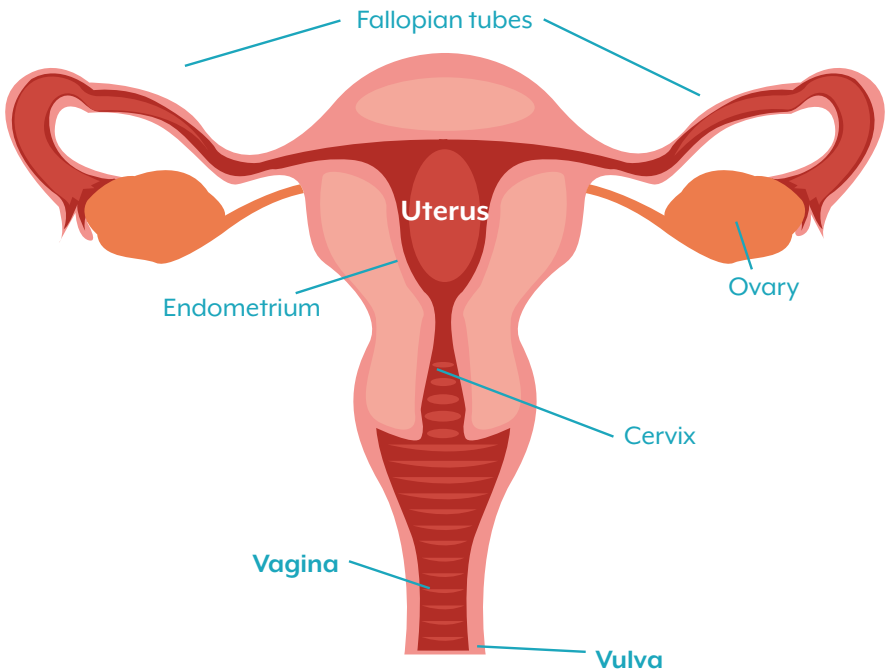
*Bentley Nuutah Valley Native Primary Care Center  
Wellness Center (907) 631-7630*

**GYNECOLOGICAL CANCERS** are often not discussed because it can be uncomfortable or even embarrassing to talk about health issues using words like “vagina” or “vulva”. Southcentral Foundation is raising awareness about, and remove the stigma associated with, discussing female health issues. Let’s open the lines of communication and help all women to feel comfortable discussing gynecological issues with their medical providers and with each other. All women have a shared responsibility with medical providers to make informed decisions about their health.

**It is important to be an advocate for your own health and let your medical provider know if something is out of the ordinary for you.**

# What is Gynecological Cancer?

Gynecological cancer is any cancer that starts in a woman's reproductive organs in different places within a woman's pelvis.



## ***Types of gynecological cancers include:***

- Cervical cancer
- Ovarian cancer
- Uterine cancer
- Vaginal cancer
- Vulvar cancer

Each gynecological cancer has different signs and symptoms, risk factors, and prevention strategies. All women are at risk for gynecological cancer. When gynecological cancers are found early, treatment is most effective.

# Cervical Cancer

The cervix is located at the lowest portion of the uterus and extends into the vagina. Most cervical cancers are caused by exposure to human papillomavirus (HPV), a common virus that is spread during sex that usually goes away on its own. However, if HPV does not resolve on its own, it can lead to cervical cancer.

## Risk Factors

- HPV infection
- Early age of sexual activity
- Women who have had more than three full-term pregnancies
- Immunosuppression
- Long term oral contraceptive use
- Family history of cervical cancer
- Tobacco use
- Having several sexual partners

## Risk Reduction

- Being tobacco free
- Using a condom
- Limiting number of sexual partners
- Regular Pap test screenings (pap smear) starting at age 21
- Receiving the HPV vaccination and/or vaccinating your children

## Symptoms

- Cervical cancer may cause no signs or symptoms early on. However, advanced cervical cancer may cause abnormal bleeding or discharge from the vagina.

## Screening

- There are two screenings that can help prevent or find cervical cancer early:
  - » **Pap test:** looks for cell changes (pre-cancers) on the cervix that can become cancerous if not treated appropriately
  - » **HPV test:** looks for the virus that can cause cells on the cervix to change

**Did you know**  
**HPV causes**  
**91%**  
**of cervical**  
**Cancer?**



# Ovarian Cancer

Ovarian cancer is a type of cancer that occurs inside, near, or on the outer layer of the ovaries. The female reproductive system contains two ovaries, one on each side of the uterus. These ovaries produce eggs for reproduction and hormones, such as estrogen and progesterone.

## Risk Factors

- Increasing age
- Personal and/or family history of ovarian cancer, breast cancer, uterine cancer, or colorectal cancer
- Having endometriosis
- Genetics
- Never given birth or gave birth to first child after the age of 30
- Never taken oral contraceptives
- Obesity
- Started menstruation before age 12

## Symptoms

- Bloating, upset stomach, or heartburn
- Pelvic, abdominal pain, or back pain
- Difficulty eating or feeling full quickly
- Urinary symptoms (urgency or frequency)
- Pain with urination or sex
- Changes in bowel habits
- Fatigue
- Nausea

## Screening

- There is **no regular screening** for ovarian cancer
- A Pap smear **does not** screen for ovarian cancer

## Diagnostic Tests

- If a woman is symptomatic, certain diagnostic tests can be used to detect ovarian cancer, including:
  - » CA-125 blood test
  - » Rectovaginal exam
  - » Transvaginal or pelvic ultrasound
  - » Biopsy

## Risk Reduction

- Being tobacco free
- Healthy diet and exercise
- Using oral contraceptives for more than 5 years
- Giving birth
- Breastfeeding
- Removing the ovaries and/or hysterectomy

Some signs and symptoms are **common for many other health issues**. It is important to advocate for yourself and talk to your provider if symptoms are out of the ordinary.

# Uterine (Endometrial) Cancer

When cancer occurs in the uterus, it is called uterine cancer. Endometrial cancer also occurs in the uterus, but within the lining of the uterus, called the endometrium.

## Risk Factors

- Being 50 years or older
- Being overweight
- Diabetes
- Family history of ovarian cancer, breast cancer, uterine cancer, or colorectal cancer
- Personal history of breast cancer, ovarian cancer, endometrial hyperplasia, or PCOS
- Taking estrogen without progesterone as treatment for menopause
- Having fertility problems or having fewer than five periods in a year before menopause
- More years of menstruation
- Never been pregnant

## Symptoms

- Bleeding or spotting between periods
- Any abnormal vaginal discharge
- Pelvic pain
- Pain with urination or sex

## Screening

- There is **no regular screening** for uterine cancer.
- A Pap smear **does not** screen for uterine cancer.

## Diagnostic Tests

- If a woman is symptomatic, certain diagnostic tests can be used to detect uterine cancer, including:
  - » Transvaginal or pelvic ultrasound
  - » Endometrial biopsy

## Risk Reduction

- Being tobacco free
- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Using oral contraceptives for more than 1 year
- Talking to your provider about the risks of hormone therapy after menopause
- Having a healthy diet and exercising

18  
out of every  
100,000

American Indian and Alaska Native women are diagnosed with uterine cancer every year.

# Vaginal and Vulvar Cancers

When cancer occurs in the vagina (birth canal), it is called vaginal cancer. When cancer occurs in the vulva (the external parts of the female genitals), it is called vulvar cancer.

## Risk Factors

- Increasing age
- HPV infection
- History of cervical cancer or cervical pre-cancer
- Having an immune-compromising condition
- Tobacco use
- Exposure to miscarriage prevention drug, diethylstilbestrol (vaginal)
- Having a skin condition called lichen sclerosis (vulvar)

## Symptoms

### Vaginal

- Unusual vaginal bleeding
- Any abnormal vaginal discharge
- Pelvic pain
- Lump or mass in your vagina
- Frequent urination
- Constipation

### Vulvar

- Itching that doesn't go away
- Pain and tenderness
- Bleeding that isn't from menstruation
- Skin changes, like color changes or thickening
- Lumps, sores, or ulcers on vulva that don't go away

## Screening

- There is **no regular screening** for vaginal or vulvar cancers. A Pap smear does not screen for vaginal or vulvar cancers. However, seeing your doctor regularly for well-woman exams, with or without a Pap smear, is the best way to catch these cancers in the early stages.

## Diagnostic Tests

- If a woman is symptomatic, certain diagnostic tests can be used to detect vaginal and/or vulvar cancers, including:
  - » Pelvic exam
  - » Colposcopy
  - » Biopsy

## Risk Reduction

- Being tobacco free
- Avoiding HPV infection
- Receiving the HPV vaccination



# Well Woman Exam

## Prevention and risk reduction are key for cervical health.

A well-women exam is recommended annually and focuses on a women's sexual, reproductive, and overall health. It may include the following: physical, clinical breast exam, mammogram (40 or older), pelvic exam, and pap smear and HPV test (if applicable).

## Have your first Pap test when you're 21. If your test results are normal you can wait three years for your next Pap test.

- HPV tests aren't recommended for screening women under 30.

## When you turn 30 you have your choice:

- If your test results are normal, get a Pap every three years.
- Get both a Pap and HPV test every five years.

## You can stop screening if:

- You're older than 65 and have had normal Pap test results for many years.
- Your cervix was removed during surgery for a non-cancerous condition, like fibroids.

Well-women exams are important. It provides an opportunity for you and your provider to talk about any concerning changes, screening options, birth control, planning for pregnancy, health goals, and more.

## Before your appointment, it may be helpful to note and list any physical changes such as the following:

*Changes in breast tissue*

*Changes in bowel movements*

*Abnormal vaginal discharge or bleeding*

*Pain with urination or sex*

*Pelvic or abdominal pain*

*Nausea*

*Changes in appetite*

*Increase body hair growth or scalp hair loss*

**Be ready to describe what your symptoms feel like, when they started and what makes them better or worse.**





# HPV Vaccination

The  
**HPV vaccine**  
can prevent  
**90%**  
of  
**HPV**  
cancers.

## HPV Vaccination

The HPV vaccine is a series of shots that work to help prevent HPV infections, pre-cancers, and cancers of the cervix. The American Cancer Society and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend the HPV vaccination start for boys and girls at age 11 or 12 but can be started as early as 9 years old. The HPV vaccination is most effective before exposure to the virus occurs.

- The vaccine is also available for females ages 13-26 and males ages 13-21 who have not started the vaccine, or have started, but not completed the series.

**It is important to note that no vaccine provides complete protection against all cancer-causing types of HPV. Routine screenings for cervical cancer are still necessary.**



# Community Resources

Individuals may need to meet program guidelines to receive services from the following cancer resources:

## **Advanced Oncology Associates:**

(907) 771-0517

aoaalaska.com

## **Advanced Physical Therapy:**

(907) 279-4266

aptak.com

- Lymphedema therapy

## **Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program**

(800) 410-6266

dhss.alaska.gov

- Clinical breast exams
- Pelvic exams and Pap tests
- Screening and diagnostic mammograms

\*Services are free to women who meet program guidelines.

## **Alaska Legal Services Corporation:**

(907) 272-9431

alsc-law.org

- Free general civil legal aid services

## **Alaska Native Medical Center:**

(907) 563-2662

anmc.org

- Infusion services
- Oncology and hematology clinic
- Palliative care
- Quiana House
  - » Hotel coordination
  - » Lodging
  - » Shuttle service
  - » Travel coordination

## **Alaska Women's Cancer Care**

(907) 562-4673

alaskawomenscancercare.com

Alaska Women's Cancer Care is the only Gynecologic Oncology practice in the state of Alaska.

## **Alaska's Quit Line:**

(800) 784-8669

alaskaquitline.com

- Tobacco treatment counseling
- Free NRT patches

## **American Cancer Society Alaska:**

(907) 277-8696

cancer.org

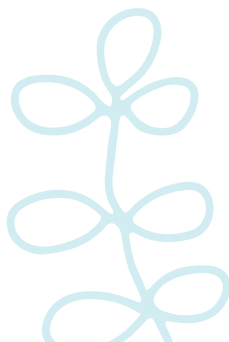
- Advocacy events
- Cancer treatment support services
  - » Air transportation program
  - » Hotel partner program
  - » Free wigs
  - » Local resource connection
  - » Support groups

## **Anchorage Project Access:**

(907) 743-6600

anchorageprojectaccess.org

- Health care for those with financial need



**Anchorage Radiation Oncology Center:**

(907) 562-2002

[anchorageradonc.com](http://anchorageradonc.com)

- Radiation therapy
- Nutrition support
- Oncology massage
- Cancer care support
- Naturopathic medicine

**Anchorage Radiation Therapy Center:**

(907) 276-2400

[alaskaradiationtherapy.com](http://alaskaradiationtherapy.com)

**Cancer Connection:**

(907) 796-2273

[cancerconnectionak.org](http://cancerconnectionak.org)

- Cancer survivor support group
- Let's Talk Program
  - » Connects cancer patients with cancer survivors for one-on-one support
- Seattle apartment rental
- Travel assistance

**Let Every Woman Know:**

(907) 263-1009

[leteverywomanknow.org](http://leteverywomanknow.org)

- Advocacy
- Educational resources
- Retreats
- Support groups

**Mat-Su Aging and Disability Resource Center:**

(907) 373-3632

[linksprc.org](http://linksprc.org)

- Chronic and acute medical assistance program

**Mat-Su Valley Cancer Center:**

(907) 707-1333

[matsuvallcancer.com](http://matsuvallcancer.com)

**Providence Cancer Center:**

(907) 212-6870

[alaska.providence.org](http://alaska.providence.org)

- Educational classes and support
- Free wigs
- Genetic counseling
- Patient navigation
- Oncology dietitian
- Oncology rehabilitation
  - » Lymphedema therapy and education classes
  - » Exercise rehabilitation
- Susan Butcher Family Center

**Southcentral Foundation:**

(907) 729-4955

(800) 478-3343

[southcentralfoundation.com](http://southcentralfoundation.com)

- Dietitian services
- Family Wellness Warriors Initiative
  - » Support Groups
- Health Education
  - » Cancer support group
- Family Health Resources
  - » Medicaid and Medicare support
- Quit Tobacco Program

**Valley Radiation Therapy Center:**

(907) 745-2999

[alaskaradiationtherapy.com](http://alaskaradiationtherapy.com)

**Women LISTEN:**

[womenlisten.org](http://womenlisten.org)

[generalinformation@womenlisten.org](mailto:generalinformation@womenlisten.org)

- Cancer support groups for women
- Retreats
- Wellness baskets for women newly diagnosed with cancer

# Glossary

**Biopsy:** The removal of a piece of tissue from the body for diagnostic examination and/or to determine the type and extent of a disease.

**Cancer:** A disease that causes the cells of the body to grow at a rapid, uncontrolled rate. When cancer occurs in a certain area of the body, it is named after the body system that it occurs in, i.e., ovarian cancer, cervical cancer, etc. Even when cancer spreads (metastasizes) to other areas of the body, it is still named for the body system it started in.

**Colposcopy:** Examination of the cervical, vaginal, or vulvar areas of the female body using a colposcope, an instrument that allows a medical provider to observe these tissues by using magnification.

**Diagnostic Test:** Different than a health screening or screening test. Diagnostic tests are medical tests used to determine the presence of and type of disease a person is suspected of having based on the symptoms they are experiencing.

**Endometrial Hyperplasia:** An abnormal thickening of the lining of the uterus.

**Screening Test:** A medical test done to detect potential disease in a person without symptoms.

**Ultrasound:** A type of imaging that uses sound waves to look at structures inside the body.

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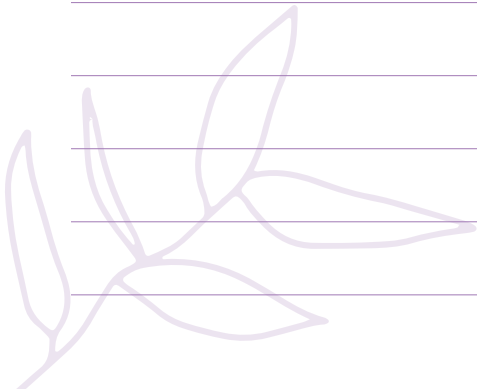
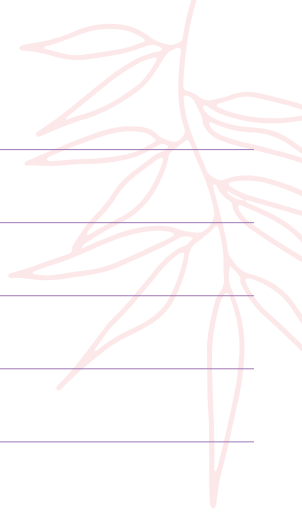
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# Notes





***Benteh Nuutah***

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[southcentralfoundation.com](http://southcentralfoundation.com)

