

# Cervical Cancer Awareness and Knowledge Survey

## An Executive Summary

### OVERVIEW

A new survey from the National Association of Nurse Practitioners in Women's Health (NPWH) evaluates women's evolving awareness, knowledge and behaviors related to the human papillomavirus (HPV) and cervical cancer prevention. NPWH hopes these results will highlight the need for increased cervical cancer education to assure that the most up-to-date screening guidelines are widely understood by women and practiced by healthcare providers.

### KEY FINDINGS

*Most women still believe a lot of HPV "myths"*

- In many cases, what women think they know about HPV and cervical cancer prevention are actually myths:
  - **More than 50%** of women don't know that cervical cancer is almost entirely preventable, because it has a known cause (HPV) and we can identify who has it. In fact, cervical cancer is virtually 100% preventable when women are routinely screened. The new HPV vaccine will assist as well.
  - **35%** of women think the Pap (which looks for abnormal cervical cells that can turn into cancer) detects ovarian cancer. However, the Pap can only detect cervical cancer or its precursor conditions.  
**More than a quarter** of women believe a Pap is accurate enough to protect against cervical cancer, especially if a liquid-based Pap is used. However, the truth is that the Pap – no matter what the type – fails to identify some women at risk when used alone.<sup>1,2</sup>
  - **Nearly one-third** of women believe the HPV test (which directly detects cancer-causing types of the virus) isn't necessary if a woman is no longer sexually active or is in a monogamous relationship. However, an HPV infection can remain in the body for months or years after a previous exposure.
  - **Over one-third** of women surveyed said they did not know that insurance usually covers HPV testing.
- Overall, women are aware of HPV, but knowledge about the virus and the link between HPV and cervical cancer is low:
  - **More than 60%** of women are not aware of any health problems associated with HPV.

*Women aren't talking about the relationship between HPV and cervical cancer*

<sup>1</sup> J. Cuzick, G. Ronco, N. Segnan, P. Giorgio-Rossi et al, "Human Papilloma Testing and Liquid-Based Cytology: Results at Recruitment From the New Technologies for Cervical Cancer Randomized Controlled Trial." *The Journal of the National Cancer Institute* 2006; 98: 765-74.

<sup>2</sup> M. Arbyn, C. Bergeron, P. Klinkhamer et al, "Liquid Compared with Conventional Cytology: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis." *Obstetrics & Gynecology* 2008; 111: 167-177.

## KEY FINDINGS (CONTINUED)

***Older women need to learn about the tools they need to prevent cervical cancer***

- Women who are least at risk of developing cervical cancer due to their young age (>30) are more knowledgeable about its cause and more likely to discuss HPV openly with their healthcare providers than their older counterparts. Yet, older women are more likely to have persistent, high-risk HPV infections that can lead to cervical cancer, and therefore would benefit most from adding the HPV test to the Pap.
  - Women under 20 are **twice as likely** to recall speaking to their doctors or nurses about HPV and its link to cervical cancer.
  - Although 90% of women 30+ considered themselves somewhat or very familiar with the preventive tests they need, **58%** had not heard of the HPV test, and **86%** did not recall their doctors or nurses ever talking to them about the test.
  - Yet, the older a woman is, the more confident she is that her provider is giving her all of the preventive tests she needs! More than **half** of older women said they are *very confident* that they receive the most up-to-date and effective preventive exams and screenings.

## METHODOLOGY/RESULTS

An online, quantitative survey, fielded by Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates (PSB), was conducted among a total of 1,000 women age 20 and older from Dec. 20, 2007 to Jan. 6, 2008. The survey evaluated the level of awareness and knowledge about cervical cancer and HPV.

*For more information on the survey or cervical cancer prevention, or to arrange interviews with Susan Wysocki or Jodi McKinney, contact Traci Tournoux or Lauren Klingler at 212-598-4400 x160/178.*