



Gynecologic Cancer Awareness Month Fact Sheet Commonly Asked Questions

What are gynecologic cancers?

Gynecologic cancers are the uncontrolled growth and spread of abnormal cells originating in the female reproductive organs, including the cervix, ovaries, uterus, fallopian tubes, vagina, and vulva.

What causes gynecologic cancers?

There are many factors that cause gynecologic cancers. Medical research has discovered that some classes of genes, called oncogenes and tumor suppressor genes promote the growth of cancer. The abnormal function of these genes can be acquired (e.g., through smoking, aging, environmental influences) or inherited. Almost all cervical cancers and some cancers of the vagina and vulva are caused by a virus known as HPV, or Human Papillomavirus.

Can gynecologic cancers be prevented?

Screening and self-examinations conducted regularly can result in the detection of certain types of gynecologic cancers in their earlier stages, when treatment is more likely to be successful and a complete cure is a possibility. Diet, exercise, and lifestyle choices play a significant role in the prevention of cancer. Additionally, knowledge of family history can increase the chance of prevention or early diagnosis by determining if someone may have a gene which makes them susceptible to cancer

Who should treat gynecologic cancers?

Gynecologic cancers should be treated by a gynecologic oncologist.

A gynecologic oncologist is a board-certified obstetrician/gynecologist who has an additional three to four years of specialized training in treating gynecologic cancers from an American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology-approved program. This subspecialty program provides training in the biology and pathology of gynecologic cancers, as well as in all forms of treatment for these diseases, including surgery, radiation, chemotherapy and experimental treatments.

How are gynecologic cancers treated?

Gynecologic cancers are treated by using one or more of the following; surgery, radiation therapy or chemotherapy . The choice of therapy depends on the type and stage of the cancer.

Who is at risk?

Every woman is at risk for developing a gynecologic cancer. It is estimated that there will be about 78,000 new cases diagnosed and approximately 28,000 deaths from gynecologic cancers in the United States during 2007.¹

¹ American Cancer Society. Cancer Facts & Figures, 2007. Available at: http://www.cancer.org/docroot/stt/stt_0.asp. Accessed April 19, 2007.