

# Mayo Clinic Q & A - Black women and cervical cancer - Dr. Ol...

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

cervical cancer, black women, disparities, women, mayo clinic, provider, systemic racism, routine screening, vaccine, undergo, hpv, access, important, screening, diagnosed, affects, later stages, cardenas, q&a, outcomes

## SPEAKERS

Dr. Olivia Cardenas-Trowers, DeeDee Stiepan, Narrator

**N** Narrator 00:01

Coming up on Mayo Clinic Q&A, cervical cancer is one of many health outcomes that disproportionately affects women based on racial and ethnic backgrounds. The incidence of cervical cancer is greater in black and Hispanic women compared to white women. Today we'll examine these disparities and learn the steps that all women can take to prevent and treat cervical cancer.

**D** Dr. Olivia Cardenas-Trowers 00:23

To help them get the best care, establishing care with a gynecologic provider or primary care provider that you trust is very important because if you're able to dialogue with somebody that you trust, you feel more comfortable sharing things that can help prevent you from getting certain conditions, and they can help you navigate the system better.

**D** DeeDee Stiepan 00:44

Welcome, everyone to the Mayo Clinic Q&A podcast, I'm DeeDee Stiepan, sitting in for Dr. Halena Gazelka. While the rate of cervical cancer has been declining for decades in the United States, health disparities persist. According to the American Cancer Society, Hispanic women have the highest incidence rate of cervical cancer followed by non-Hispanic black women, and black women are more likely to die from the disease than women of any other race or ethnicity. Here to help us understand disparities and cervical cancer is Mayo Clinic women's health provider and urogynecologic surgeon, Dr. Olivia Cardenas-Trowers. Welcome to the program. Great to have you.

**D** DeeDee Stiepan 01:00

**D** Dr. Olivia Cardenas-Trowers 01:22

Thank you. I'm happy to be here.

**D** DeeDee Stiepan 01:24

Why are non-Hispanic black women more likely to be diagnosed with cervical cancer than non-Hispanic white women?

**D** Dr. Olivia Cardenas-Trowers 01:32

That's a great question. And I think the best way to answer that is to remind people of a couple of things. First of all, that race is a social construct. So, there really isn't a genetic difference that is causing black women to unfortunately die at higher rates of cervical cancer. It really has to do more with historical background with things like racism, and now systemic racism, these disparities that started way back when and that have infiltrated the healthcare system and have affected these women's access to resources and therefore, some of the health care that they need. And this trickles down into poor outcomes, essentially.

**D** DeeDee Stiepan 02:17

Black women are more likely to die from cervical cancer than women of any other races or ethnicities. Why is that?

**D** Dr. Olivia Cardenas-Trowers 02:23

So, because of systemic factors, like systemic racism and disparities, this affects various things from these women's access to health care systems in general, things that you might not even think of like transportation, health literacy, even trust in their provider because of injustices that have happened in the past. So, because of these things, as you can imagine it affects their health care. They may not undergo the typical screening that could catch an abnormality earlier. And then therefore, these cancers may be diagnosed at later stages. And, of course, if that happens then the likelihood of mortality is higher. Also, they may have problems getting access to treatment. They may not have the finances to be able to undergo surgery, or chemo/radiation. So, all of these can factor into the increased mortality in black women.

**D** DeeDee Stiepan 03:29

What can black women do to reduce their risk of cervical cancer?

**D** Dr. Olivia Cardenas-Trowers 03:35

That's a good question. I think there's two ways to kind of approach this question. One is what can we do to decrease black women's risk of dying from cervical cancer. So again, trying to address the factors that we know lead to poor outcomes, the systemic racism, the disparities,

again access, so addressing those barriers. And then from the patient standpoint, once they're in the system, you know, essentially once they're in the system supporting them, making sure that they have access to treatment, the resources they need, the support so that they can do routine screening so that they have access to the results, if any follow-up or intervention is needed, being able to provide that for them, or at least, you know, having some type of support for them.

**D** DeeDee Stiepan 04:33

So, what are the signs and symptoms of cervical cancer?

**D** Dr. Olivia Cardenas-Trowers 04:38

Sure, so for early cervical cancer there actually really aren't any symptoms. It is not really until later stages where you may see vaginal bleeding, whether that's abnormal, so you're if you're still menstruating and it seems a little bit heavier, or you're menopausal and then you start bleeding again, or have bleeding after, or pain after intercourse or pelvic pain, heavy discharge, those are some of the more common symptoms of later stage cervical cancer.

**D** DeeDee Stiepan 05:09

Can you talk about how cervical cancer is diagnosed?

**D** Dr. Olivia Cardenas-Trowers 05:13

Sure. So, cervical cancer is diagnosed by tissue sampling. So, that's typically a biopsy, however, pap smear screening can pick up the abnormal cells that can lead to a diagnosis.

**D** DeeDee Stiepan 05:30

And so, if diagnosed with cervical cancer, what is it that black women can do to ensure that they get the best possible treatment and care?

**D** Dr. Olivia Cardenas-Trowers 05:40

So, in addition to supporting these women, to help them get the best care, hopefully they are with a provider that they trust, and essentially working with the provider, expressing their preferences, their concerns, and hopefully that provider listens, and also is able to address those concerns so that the patient can navigate the system as efficiently and thoroughly as possible so that she gets the best care.

**D** DeeDee Stiepan 06:11

What would you say if you had to say the most important or one of the most important things that black women need to know to protect themselves from cervical cancer?

D

Dr. Olivia Cardenas-Trowers 06:21

So, I think everyone should know, including black women, is that HPV, or human papilloma virus, is the leading cause of cervical cancer. And that's important because one there is a vaccine that can be given as early as nine-years-old, up to 45-years-old. So, even if you've had HPV before, you can still undergo this vaccine if you're between those ages. And it's also available for men which is good. So, protecting yourself by getting the vaccine and then getting routine pap smears because like I said earlier, you know, unfortunately, when you're having the symptoms of cervical cancer it is usually at an advanced stage. So, if we can catch it with just a screening exam, obviously, outcomes would be so much better. So, those are my two big things that I would stress, get the vaccine, and then do routine screening.

D

DeeDee Stiepan 07:18

Both really important things to know. Is there anything else that you wanted to add?

D

Dr. Olivia Cardenas-Trowers 07:24

You know, establishing care with a gynecologic provider or primary care provider that you trust is very important because if you're able to dialogue with somebody that you trust, they'll be able to help you, you know, feel more comfortable sharing things that can help prevent you from getting certain conditions, and they can help you navigate the system better.

D

DeeDee Stiepan 07:46

Very good. Good information. Our thanks to Mayo Clinic women's health provider and urogynecologic surgeon, Dr. Olivia Cardenas-Trowers, for joining us today to discuss disparities and cervical cancer. Thanks so much.

D

Dr. Olivia Cardenas-Trowers 07:59

Thank you.

N

Narrator 08:00

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