

Girls Beware: Protect Your Transformation Zone

Every female has one. Gynecologists examine it because it makes young women more vulnerable to infections. Sexually transmitted diseases take advantage of its hospitable climate, move in and inflict damage, sometimes permanent or even life threatening. Chances are, though, few girls know about their transformation zone.

One of the few doctors to publicly discuss the transformation zone is Dr. Miriam Grossman, a medical doctor in the student health center at The University of California, Los Angeles. Her new book, *Unprotected*, mentions the importance of the transformation zone to women's health; she laments that the transformation zone is seldom discussed with young women. WebMD describes it this way:

The cervix contains two kinds of cells: rectangular columnar cells and flat, scale-like squamous cells. Columnar cells are constantly changing into squamous cells in an area of the cervix called the transformation (transitional) zone.

The transformation zone is an area of changing cells and it is the most common place on the cervix for abnormal cells to develop. These abnormal cells can be detected on a Pap smear.

The location of the transformation zone varies among women. In teenage girls, the transformation zone is on the immature cervix's outer surface and is more susceptible to infection than in adult women. In older women, the transformation zone may be higher in the cervical canal.

So, why is this information important?

When an adolescent girl or young woman has sexual intercourse, she is much more susceptible to sexually transmitted diseases due to the transformation zone on her immature cervix.

Dr. Janice Shaw Crouse, Director and Senior Fellow of Concerned Women for America's think tank, The Beverly LaHaye Institute, said, "There is so much about the relationship between sexual activity and girls' health that is kept under wraps because of politically correct thinking. It is unbelievable that doctors are not warning young girls that there is an area of the cervix that makes them exceptionally susceptible to sexually transmitted diseases. Sadly, instead of solid information, girls are taught that they are invulnerable; most have no idea that there are serious consequences to early sex. Girls still think that everything will be OK as long as they engage in so-called 'safe sex.' While doctors and clinic personnel are making these untrue statements, thousands of girls are engaging in behavior that risks their health, well-being, and in some instances, their lives."

If a girl is on the birth control pill the transformation zone may be enlarged, thus increasing the risk of infection, according to Yahoo! Health.

One of the STDs that is especially risky for girls is the human papillomavirus (HPV). The Centers for Disease Control report approximately 20 million people are currently infected with HPV and by age 50, at least 80 percent of women will have acquired genital HPV infection.

The American Cancer Society offers this information to women about HPV and cervical cancer (italics added):

Almost all (>99 percent) cervical cancers are related to HPV. Of these, about 70 percent are caused by HPV types 16 or 18. About 500,000 pre-cancerous cell changes of the cervix, vagina, and vulva are diagnosed each year in the US, and over half are related to HPV 16 and 18. Low-grade cervix cell changes are caused by a variety of HPV types, including 16, 18, 6, or 11.

Although nearly all cervical cancers are related to HPV, most genital HPV infections do not cause cervical cancer. Most people who test positive for genital HPV DNA in research studies eventually test negative, often within 6 to 12 months. Scientists are still not sure whether this means that a person's immune system has completely destroyed all of the HPV or has only suppressed the infection to an extremely low level (too low to be detected by available tests). If even a few cells of the cervix still contain HPV, it's possible that the virus may start to become active again if your immune system becomes very weakened.

It is possible that some low-grade cervix cell changes and some high-grade cervix cell changes may suddenly occur many years after first HPV exposure. This could help explain how a woman could get such changes after many years of normal Pap tests and no history of a partner change.

If the HPV infection isn't eliminated or suppressed, the virus may cause cervix cells to change and become pre-cancer cells. True pre-cancer cell changes are called high-grade SIL (squamous intraepithelial lesions), sometimes abbreviated as HSIL. Another term for HSIL is CIN 2 and CIN 3. CIN is an abbreviation for cervical intraepithelial neoplasia.

Pre-cancer cells are not cancer. Although some pre-cancer changes may return to normal on their own, most cases of CIN 3 are likely to progress to cervical cancer over a period of time that probably takes about 10 years if not detected and treated. But very few HPV infections lead to cervical cancer. Pre-cancer cells are found by having regular Pap tests.

Crouse added, "In spite of the danger of infection, very little is said about HPV -- even though high school and college aged girls are particularly vulnerable to the infection. The facts make any caring person wonder why there is such resistance to abstinence education?"

The American Cancer Society site also says:

Infection is very common soon after a woman becomes sexually active. In one recent study, more than 50% of college age women were found to have acquired an HPV infection within 4 years of first having sex. Almost half of the infections are in those between 15 and 25 years of age.

Maybe this is why the new HPV vaccine has been approved for use in girls as young as 9 and up to 26-year-old women. Their transformation zones are ripe for catching HPV during intercourse and they increase their risk by having sex with multiple partners. And doctors and scientists know this.

The surest way to prevent HPV according to the CDC, American Cancer Society and National Cancer Institute is to abstain from sexual activity.

HPV is just one of the more than 20 sexually transmitted diseases currently identified. STDs often show no early signs or symptoms and left untreated, they can lead to infertility, tubal pregnancy, chronic pain, cervical cancer and other complications.

WebMD says one of the risk factors for being infected with an STD for girls is: "Being sexually active at an early age. Sexual activity before age 18 may increase the risk of getting an STD, because teen girls may have more sex partners or they may be less likely to use condoms to reduce their risk. Girls younger than 18 years of age get STDs 2 to 3 times more often than those older than 18. The cells of the transformation zone of the cervix are more susceptible to infection in teen girls."

Have you ever heard this information from the news, pamphlets or your doctor? If you had sex at a young age, would this information have influenced your decision? Would you have waited until you were older? Are you suffering the consequences of a previously undetected and untreated STD now? If you knew sex at an early age posed a possible health and fertility risk to you in the future because of the way your body is designed, would you have taken the risk?

Please share this information with girls and young women in your life. Give them the facts and ask them, "Is it worth the risk?"

Girls, if you wait for your transformation zones to mature before having sex, you will avoid these diseases and consequences. Abstaining from sex until you are married to a man who has abstained is the best protection of all.