

Preventing Cervical Cancer: Two Union Women Take Action



Did you know?

- Half of women diagnosed with cervical cancer are between the ages of 35 and 55. Slightly over 20% of women with cervical cancer are diagnosed when they are over 65. It is important, therefore, for older women to continue having regular Pap tests and HPV tests at least until age 70, and possibly longer.
- Cervical cancer occurs most often in Hispanic women; the rate for Hispanic women is twice that for non-Hispanic white women.
- African-American women develop this cancer about 50% more often than non-Hispanic white women.
- Vietnamese-American and Korean-American women are two other groups at increased risk.

New HPV vaccine

The FDA has approved a vaccine for girls and women 9-26 that will prevent about 70% of all cases of cervical cancer. For more information, see www.fda.gov/womens/getthefacts/hpv.html.

Union members Christine Baze and Tamika Felder are survivors of cervical cancer. They have used their experiences to let women know that the #1 risk factor for cervical cancer is not being screened regularly.

Additionally, both Christine and Tamika educate women about the link between human papillomavirus (HPV) and cervical cancer, so that women understand that persistent high risk HPV infections are the cause of cervical cancer.

The Pap test can detect cell changes caused by HPV, while the HPV test can detect the virus that causes these changes. The Pap test is the appropriate screening test for women younger than 30; a Pap and HPV test together are appropriate for women 30 or older.

Unfortunately, these facts are not well known. As a result, the American Cancer Society estimates that in 2006, about 9,710 cases of invasive cervical cancer will be diagnosed in the United States and nearly 3,700 women will die from it.

Christine, a member of Musicians Local 9-535 in Boston, is a singer/songwriter who always dreamed of being a rock star. In 2000, she was diagnosed with cervical cancer, before current cervical cancer screening technologies were available. In 2002, after recovering from surgery and treatment, she created *Popsmeat.org* (www.popsmeat.org), a non-profit organization that spreads her

message through pop music. And in 2003 she launched a national musical tour, "The Yellow Umbrella Tour," to spread awareness about cervical cancer. After playing in six cities in 2003, the tour hit 20 cities in 2004 and 21 cities in 2005.

The 2006 Yellow Umbrella Tour this fall played in 36 cities. For more information, visit www.yellowumbrellatour.com.

Tamika, now a member of AFSCME District Council 20, was diagnosed with cervical cancer in May 2001. After surgery and treatment, she, too, decided to tell her story as a way to get the message out. She had no health insurance and no union when she was diagnosed and had not been screened for a number of years. It never occurred to her that she might develop cervical cancer.

"I was a successful television producer, doing great shows and then cancer came into my life," she says. "I almost didn't make it."

In January 2005, Tamika created *Tamika and Friends* (www.tamikaandfriends.org) to raise awareness about cervical cancer, its link to HPV and the importance of regular screening. The centerpiece of her program is **House Parties of five**, a social gathering of friends that mixes "girl talk" with lessons to help women become more comfortable discussing their sexual health. At the end of each party, hosts encourage guests to pass what they have learned to family and friends, and many of these women pledge to visit their gynecologists for Pap tests and/or HPV screenings.



QUICK FACTS about Cervical Cancer and HPV

- Cervical cancer is highly preventable through regular screening.
- Cervical cancer is almost always caused by a common virus—human papillomavirus (HPV).
- Most women will have HPV at some point in their lives, but few will develop cervical cancer. In fact, most women who get HPV will get rid of the virus through their body's normal healing process.
- Only HPV infection that persists for several years can put a woman at risk for cervical cancer.
- Screening for cervical cancer can be done by your doctor using just a Pap test if you're younger than 30 or a Pap and HPV test if you're 30 or older.
- A Pap test looks for cell changes in the cervix that might lead to cancer. The HPV test looks for the virus that causes cervical cancer. When used together, the Pap and HPV test can better identify women needing early intervention to prevent cervical cancer.
- The HPV test is now approved by the FDA for regular screening in women age 30 and older.
- Women should ask their healthcare providers for the test that best meets their screening needs.

The enthusiasm of women who have attended these parties prompted Tamika to run a training program this summer to teach others how to run parties.

Tamika and Friends also provides a network for cervical cancer survivors, their families and their friends.

Both Christine and Tamika are cancer-free and healthy—and thankful they are alive. Neither of them, however, can bear children. They are excited that new technologies are now available to women to bring us closer to eliminating cervical cancer altogether and they both work to share this information with women across the country.

The HPV test is one of those new technologies, as is the new HPV vaccine—targeted at two of the most deadly strains of HPV, which will help prevent girls and young women (age 9-26) from ever getting HPV.

Since the vaccine is not for everyone, Christine and Tamika want to be sure that women understand that they must continue to get screened.

New vaccine for girls and women ages 9-26 can help prevent cervical cancer

Christine and Tamika know that every person they reach—face-to-face or through articles like this—can help make cervical cancer a thing of the past by spreading the word about HPV and cervical cancer and the critical importance of regular cervical screening. They are depending on everyone who reads this to share the message with friends, family members and co-workers.

As most union women have health insurance—and most insurance plans cover cervical cancer screening—there is no reason that union women should suffer or die from cervical cancer. Get screened today!

Cervical Cancer Prevention Works — a project of the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW) — partners with Popsmeat.org and Tamika and Friends to reach union women. Visit us at www.cluw.org/cervcancer.html.

For further information, contact Carolyn J. Jacobson, Director, Cervical Cancer Prevention Works, at cjacobson@cluw.org, 202-508-6901.

Cervical Cancer Prevention Works is a project of CLUW, 815 16th St. NW, 2nd floor south, Washington, DC 20006

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