

# When Was Your Last Mammogram?

Only half of women are getting their routine annual screening

An annual mammogram remains the best tool for breast cancer detection, yet statistics still show that not enough women are getting screened.

According to the American Cancer Society (ACS), only about half of all women ages 40 to 65 report having a mammogram within the past year. That percentage decreases with lack of health insurance coverage, immigration status, level of education and ethnicity.



Despite the facts that cancer is sometimes not detected by a mammogram, and that mammograms can also show an abnormality that ends up not being cancer at all, current evidence confirms that mammograms offer a substantial benefit to women in their 40s, and that they play an important role in reducing breast cancer mortality.

The American Cancer Society (ACS) reports that in the United States death rates from breast cancer in women



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**Fernando Romero, MD, FACOG**

have been declining since 1990 due in part to early detection by mammography screening, and improvements in treatment. Currently, 60 percent of breast cancers are diagnosed early when patients have a 98 percent five-year survival rate.

“It’s important to eliminate any barriers that prohibit women from getting screening mammograms to detect breast cancer at its earliest stages when it is most

treatable,” said Board Certified OB/GYN Fernando Romero, MD FACOG. “Women 40 and older should know that they don’t need a referral to schedule a routine annual mammogram. They can call and schedule it themselves.”

Women considered at high risk for breast cancer based on certain risk factors, should get an MRI and a mammogram every year because although an MRI is considered a more sensitive test, it may still miss some cancers that a mammogram could detect.

Though incidences of breast cancer begin to drop when women reach their 80s, the American Cancer Society offers no specific age to stop mammography screening, saying that decision should be made on an individual basis based on the potential benefits and risks of each patient’s overall health status and estimated longevity.

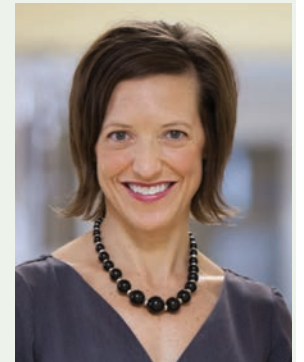
**To make an appointment for a screening mammogram, please call scheduling at Holy Family Hospital at 978-722-3800 or Holy Family Hospital at Merrimack Valley at 978-521-8121.**

**Appointments are available 7 days a week, including evenings.**

\*Holy Family Hospital and Holy Family Hospital at Merrimack Valley each possess a valid Commonwealth of Massachusetts Mammography License and Certificates of Inspection from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and are accredited by the American College of Radiology

# Should Your Child Receive the HPV Vaccine?

**Christannah Waters, MD, FACOG** is a board certified gynecologist with a special interest in adolescent gynecology practicing at Merrimack Valley Surgical Specialties in Haverhill. To make an appointment please call 978-912-7450.



## What is the HPV?

HPV stands for human papillomavirus. There are more than 120 types and some are spread primarily by sexual contact. Thirteen types have been linked to cervical cancer, and two types are responsible for 90 percent of genital warts.

## What are the signs of infection?

One overt symptom is genital warts. However, when HPV infects the cervix there usually are no associated symptoms, and therefore, an infected person can spread HPV without knowing it.

## Once infected, do you have HPV for life?

In most cases, your body’s immune system can successfully fight and kill the virus within a few years. But there are cases of persistent infection that can, over time, lead to precancerous and cancerous cells.

## How is persistent HPV infection managed?

Women with persistent infection are closely followed with Pap smears, which screen for precancerous cells on the cervix. Early detection can prevent death from cervical cancer so it is important to have a Pap smear done at the interval recommended by your doctor.

## Can both males and females get HPV?

Yes, and for that reason the vaccine is recommended for girls and boys ages 11 and 12. Though approved up to the age of 26, we recommend that it be given at an earlier age because it works best when administered prior to initial sexual activity and exposure to the virus.

## Do boys and girls get the same vaccine?

There are two vaccines. The bivalent vaccine is approved only for females, and it reduces the risk of cancerous and precancerous cervical cells caused by HPV types 16 and 18. The quadrivalent vaccine is approved for males and females. It reduces the risk of cancerous and precancerous cervical cells caused by HPV types 16 and 18, and adds protection for types 6 and 11, which are known to cause genital warts.

## Can people over the age of 26 get the vaccine?

At this time vaccination is only approved for ages 9 to 26. Though vaccination does not appear to be harmful if given after the age of 26, it may not be as effective because many women over the age of 26 may already have been exposed to the virus. It is important to note that the vaccine can prevent infection, but it does not cure it.

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