

Glossary¹

A

Adenocarcinoma: A cancer that develops in the lining or inner surface of an organ. Adenocarcinoma is one of the histologies that can occur in the cervix.

Adhesion: Scar tissue occurring in the abdominal cavity, fallopian tubes, or inside the uterus. Adhesions can interfere with transport of the egg and implantation of the embryo in the uterus.

Amenorrhea: Absence of menstrual flow.

Anovulation: Lack of ovulation.

Anteflexed uterus: Normal position in which the uterine corpus is flexed forward.

Anteverted uterus: Uterus that tips forward toward the bladder.

ASC-H: Atypical Squamous Cells, cannot exclude High-grade Squamous Intraepithelial Lesion (HSIL). High-grade lesion.

ASC-US: Atypical Squamous Cells of Undetermined Significance. Low-grade lesion.

Asymptomatic: without obvious symptoms or signs of disease. People with abnormal cervical cell changes are mostly asymptomatic at early stages.

Atypia/atypical: not usual or ordinary.

B

Bartholin's gland: One of two small compound mucous glands located one in each lateral wall of the vestibule of the vagina, near the vaginal opening at the base of the labia majora.

Benign: Cell changes that have nothing to do with cancer.

Biopsy: The removal and examination of a small amount of tissue to establish a diagnosis.

Bisexual: An individual who is emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to males/men and females/women. A bisexual person may not be equally attracted to both sexes, however, and the degree of attraction may vary over time.

Breakthrough bleeding: Vaginal spotting or bleeding that occurs between periods and is caused by the failure of progestin (usually taken in combination with estrogen as an oral contraceptive) to support the endometrium adequately.

C

Cancer: It is the uncontrolled, abnormal growth of cells that can invade and destroy healthy tissue. Most cancers can also spread to other parts of the body.

Carcinoma: One of the five basic kinds of cancer and the most common. It begins in epithelial tissue (the lining or covering of an organ). It may develop in cells that line the lung, intestines, bladder, breast, uterus, kidney, cervix and prostate or in skin cells.

Carcinoma in situ: The earliest stage of cancer in which young tumour cells have not yet invaded surrounding tissues. Since there is no invasion, it is therefore, not considered a cancer.

Caruncles (of the urethra): Fleishy outgrowths of distal urethral mucosa.

Cervical carcinoma: A cancer of the uterine cervix (the neck of the uterus).

Cervical dysplasia: Cervical cells that are abnormal in appearance. An abnormal tissue growth on the cervix that may progress to cancer, regress spontaneously or remain the same. Cervical dysplasia is detected through a Pap test.

Cervical ectropion: Eversion of the columnar epithelium onto the cervix.

Cervical eversion: When the tissue within the cervix "opens up" onto the outer part of the cervix.

Cervical stenosis: A blockage of the cervical canal from a congenital defect or from complications of surgical procedures. Also see cervix.

Cervicitis: An irritation of the cervix by a number of different organisms. Cervicitis is generally classified as either acute or chronic.

Cervix: The neck or lower end of the uterus or womb that connects the uterus with the vagina.

Chemotherapy: The use of drugs to treat or control cancer.

Colposcopy: Examination of the cervix and vagina using a low-powered magnifying instrument known as a colposcope in order to assess the extent and severity of any problem and to determine appropriate treatment. Small biopsies may be taken during the test.

Competence: The integration and application of knowledge, attitudes, skills and judgement required for performance in a designated role and setting.

Cone biopsy: Also known as conization, cone biopsy refers to a surgical removal of a cone-shaped specimen of tissue for examination under a microscope. The tissue removed provides a more extensive sample for diagnosis than a simple biopsy.

Conization: See cone biopsy.

Cryosurgery: A surgical procedure that uses extreme cold to destroy abnormal tissue by freezing. A general anesthetic is not required.

Cystocele: Herniation of the bladder through the anterior wall (bulging of the bladder into the vagina).

Cytology: the study of cells using a microscope. An example of this procedure is the Pap test, used to detect the cells that may lead to cervical cancer.

D

DES: Diethylstilbestrol.

Diagnosis: Identification of a disease from signs, symptoms, laboratory tests, radiological results and physical findings.

Dysmenorrhea: Menstrual discomfort or pain.

Dyspareunia: Pain in the vagina or pelvis or difficulty during sexual intercourse.

Dysplasia: Cervical cells that are abnormal in appearance. An abnormal tissue growth on the cervix that may progress to cancer if not treated in time. Cervical dysplasia is detected through a Pap test.

E

Endocervical curettage (ECC): The removal of tissue from the inside of the cervix using a spoon-shaped instrument called a curette.

Erythema: Redness.

Excoriation: Loss of skin by e.g. scratching.

Exudate: Fluid or discharge usually as a result of inflammation.

F

False negative report: a negative result when in reality it is positive in nature.

False positive report: a positive result when in reality it is negative in nature.

Female to Male (FTM): A term used to identify a transsexual individual who was assigned the female sex at birth and who currently identifies as male, lives as a man, identifies as masculine, or is in the process of transitioning. Also known or referred to as FTM, FtM, F2M, or a transman.

Fimbriae: Any structure resembling a fringe or border.

Fissure: A narrow slit or cleft.

Fistula (of the bladder): Abnormal connection between the bladder and another structure such as the vagina or rectum.

Fornix: Upper part of the vagina.

Fourchette: Posterior of labia minora.

Friability: Fragile tissue that may bleed easily (e.g. when a swab is taken).

FSH: Follicle-stimulating hormone.

G

Gay: Male-identified individuals that have emotional, physical and/or sexual attractions to other male-identified individuals. “Homosexual” is a clinical term once used to refer to gay individuals.

Glandular premalignancy and malignancy: A pathology result of atypical glandular cells, endocervical adenocarcinoma in situ, or adenocarcinoma.

Gnrh: Gonadotropin-releasing hormone.

Gravida: Number of pregnancies, regardless of their outcomes.

H

Homogenous: Same consistency throughout.

Homophobia: The fear, hatred, or aversion towards individuals who identify or are perceived as being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirit, or queer.

HPV: Human Papillomavirus. HPV is the common name for a group of related viruses, some of which occur on the cervix and are risk factors for cervical cancer.

HPV testing: HPV testing detects HPV DNA on the cervix. Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health (CADTH) identifies the current molecular methods for type-specific HPV detection require a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) amplification of HPV DNA followed by detection by either direct sequencing or hybridization. Direct sequencing identifies the specific HPV types found in a specimen, whereas hybridization finds presence of a high risk type of HPV without direct identification of which type.

HPV vaccine: An HPV vaccine, Gardasil, was approved for use in Canada in July 2006. This vaccine provides protection against 4 types of human papillomavirus: HPV 16, 18, 6 and 11. HPV 16 and 18 cause over 70% of all cervical cancers. HPV 6 and 11 cause 90% of all genital warts.

HSIL: High Grade Squamous Intraepithelial Lesion.

HSV 1 or 2: Herpes simplex virus one and two. HSV 1 causes oral herpes and HSV 2 causes genital herpes. HSV-1 can also cause genital herpes through transmission during oral-genital sex.

Hymenal remnants: The tissue of the hymen that is still present.

Hyperemia: Congestion or increased blood flow to the area.

Hysterectomy: Surgical removal of the uterus. The ovaries and/or cervix (part or whole) may also be removed at the same time.

I

Induration: Abnormally hard spot.

Infertility: The inability to conceive over a period of 1 year of unprotected regular intercourse has many causes, including both male and female conditions. Contributing factors in the woman include abnormalities of the vagina, cervix, uterus, fallopian tubes, and ovaries. Factors influencing fertility in both women and men include stress, nutrition, chemical substance use, chromosomal abnormalities, certain disease processes, sexual and relationship problems, and immunologic response.

Introitus: Opening to the vagina on the perineum.

Invasive cervical cancer: A stage of cancer in which it has spread from the surface of the cervix to healthy tissue deeper in the cervix or to other parts of the body.

L

Laparoscopy: Examination of the pelvic organs through use a small telescope called a laparoscope.

Laser surgery: Treatment that uses an intense, narrow beam of light (called a laser beam) to treat some forms of cancer or abnormal cells. Since a laser beam can be focused precisely on a tiny area, it is used to operate on delicate tissues. General anesthetic is unnecessary.

LEEP: Loop electrosurgical excision procedure. After freezing the cervical area, an electrical wire loop is inserted into the vagina and all the abnormal tissue is sliced off and removed.

Lesbian: Female-identified people that have emotional, physical and/or sexual attractions to other female-identified people.

Leukoplakia: Raised white plaques on cervix, may be due to different causes such as carcinoma or genital warts.

LH: Luteinizing hormone.

Liquid based cytology: With Liquid Based Cytology (LBC), a sample of cells is taken from the cervix using the spatula and brush combination or a broom-like device. The cervical sample is deposited in a liquid medium and sent to the laboratory whereby a slide is prepared for examination.

Lithotomy position: The woman lies on back, legs flexed at the thighs, thighs flexed and abducted. Stirrups may be used to support the feet.

Localized cancer: A cancerous growth that has not spread to other parts of the body.

LSIL: Low Grade Squamous Intraepithelial Lesion.

M

Male to Female (MTF): A term used to identify a transsexual individual who was assigned the male sex at birth and who currently identifies as female, lives as a woman, identifies as feminine, or is in the process of transitioning. Also known or referred to as MTF, MtF, M2F, or a transwoman.

Malignancy: A tumour consisting of cancerous cells. Cells from a malignant growth can break away and start secondary tumours elsewhere in the body.

Malignant: Cancerous.

Menarche: Onset of menstrual periods, usually occurring between age 9 and 17.

Menopause: Cessation of menstrual periods with the decline of cyclic hormonal production and function usually between the ages of 45 and 60 but may stop earlier in life, for example, as a result of illness or the surgical removal of both ovaries. Defined as absence of periods for one year.

Metastasis: The spread of cancer cells from the original tumour to other parts of the body by way of the lymph system or bloodstream.

Molluscum: Skin disease characterized by soft round masses.

Multigravida: A woman who has been pregnant several times.

Multiparity: Condition of having two or more pregnancies that resulted in viable fetuses.

N

Nulliparity: Condition of never having delivered a viable infant.

O

Oncology: The study and treatment of cancerous tumours.

Oncologist: An oncologist is a physician who specializes in diagnosing and treating cancer.

Oophorectomy: Surgical removal of the ovaries.

Oropharyngeal: A type of head and neck cancer.

Orthopnea: Ability to breathe easily only in the upright position

P

Pap test: A test in which cells are removed from the cervix and examined under a microscope. Devised by Dr. George Papanicolaou, the Pap test is an effective way to detect abnormal cells (see cervical dysplasia) or cancer. Since the Pap test (like many medical tests) is not perfect, it is important to be tested on a regular basis to lessen the chance of missing any abnormal cell changes.

Parity: Condition of having delivered an infant or infants, alive or dead, during the viability period (fetus weighing 500 g. or more or having an estimated 20-week gestation). Multiple birth is a single parity.

Partial hysterectomy: A lay term usually used to connote a hysterectomy (either total or subtotal) with preservation of the ovaries.

Pelvic exam: also called an internal examination. A gynecological examination of a woman's vagina, vulva, cervix, fallopian tubes, ovaries and uterus.

Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID): PID is an inflammatory condition of the pelvic cavity that may involve the uterus, fallopian tubes, ovaries, pelvic peritoneum or pelvic vascular system. Often caused by gonococcal and chlamydial infection, pelvic inflammatory disease may be acute or chronic. Acute PID produces very tender, bilateral adnexal areas. The woman may guard the area. The symptoms of chronic PID are bilateral, tender, irregular, and fairly fixed adnexal areas. Movement of cervix is painful.

Polyp: a cauliflower-like growth of tissue that develops in the mucous membrane lining of the colon, bladder, uterus, cervix, vocal cords, or nasal passage and protrudes into a body cavity.

Puberty: Period when secondary sexual characteristics begin to appear and sexual reproductive ability occurs.

Premenstrual syndrome (PMS): A cyclic cluster of signs and symptoms, such as breast tenderness, fluid retention, retention and mood swings, usually occurring after ovulation and before or during menses; characterized by at least 7 symptom-free days, usually in the first half of the menstrual cycle.

Q

Queer: an inclusive, unifying, sociopolitical umbrella term for people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, intersexual, genderqueer and/or those whose sexual identity or activities place them outside the mainstream.

R

Rectocele: Herniation of the rectum through the vaginal wall.

Retroflexed uterus: Normal position in which the uterine corpus flexes toward the rectum at an acute angle.

Retroverted uterus: Normal position in which the uterine corpus flexes toward the rectum, but at a less acute angle than if retroflexed.

Risk factor: Anything that increases a person's chances of developing disease. For example, smoking is a risk factor for lung, head/neck and cervical cancer.

Rugose: Marked by ridges, wrinkled.

S

Salpingitis: Inflammation or infection of the Fallopian tube is often associated with PID. Salpingitis causes lower quadrant pain with tenderness on bimanual examination.

Schiller test: a test in which iodine is applied to the cervix. It is used during a colposcopy. They iodine colours healthy cells brown. Abnormal cells remain unstained, usually appearing white or yellow.

Self-sampling: an alternative cervical cancer screening test whereby a woman collects a cervical specimen in the privacy of her home to test for HPV DNA.

Sexually active: Refers to both sexual intercourse and intimate genital contact.

Skene's gland: Glands lying just inside of and on the posterior area of the urethra in the female, one on each side of the floor of the urethra.

Speculum: A metal or plastic instrument used to spread the vagina open so that the cervix can be seen.

Squamous cell carcinoma: cancer that begins in squamous cells, which are thin, flat cells resembling fish scales. Squamous cells are found in the tissue that forms the surface of the skin, the lining of the hollow organs of the body, and the passages of the respiratory and digestive tracts.

Sub-total hysterectomy: Removal of the uterus only, leaving the cervix in situ.

Squamous premalignancy and malignancy: A pathology report of ASC-US, ASC-H, LSIL, HSIL, or squamous cell carcinoma.

Stage 1B tumors: The cancerous area is larger than in stage 1A, but is still only in the tissues of the cervix and has not spread.

STI: Sexually transmitted infection.

Stellate cervical laceration: The trauma of difficult deliveries may tear the cervix, producing permanent lacerations. In a stellate laceration, the cervix has a number of slits in a star-like pattern.

Symptomatic: Showing indications of disease or illness.

T

Total hysterectomy: Removal of the uterus and cervix.

Transgender person: An umbrella term that represents many individuals who defy the (binary male and female) 'laws' of gender. This could include transsexuals, intersex folks, cross-dressers, drag performers, genderqueers, two-spirit individuals, androgynous people, and gender non-conformists.

Transphobia: A form of oppression that comprises of the irrational fear, hatred, or aversion towards individuals who identify or are perceived to be transgender, the transgender community, or transgenderism itself. Transphobia may be expressed via discrimination, jokes, stereotypes, harassment, and/or violence.

Transsexual person: A person who typically experiences discomfort with the disparity between their physical bodies and their sense of self and therefore seeks to modify their body through hormones and/or surgical procedures in order to bring their body closer to their sexual and/or gender identity. Most transsexuals want to be perceived as the gender that is congruent with their identity, regardless of what physical changes they have pursued.

Transverse cervical laceration: The trauma of difficult deliveries may tear the cervix, producing permanent lacerations. In a transverse laceration, the cervix appears slit from side to side.

Tubal ligation: Surgical sterilization of a woman by obstructing or tying the fallopian tubes.

Tumor: A mass of abnormally growing cells that serve no useful bodily function. Tumors can be either benign or malignant.

Two-Spirited person: A term in English used to describe the ancient teachings of First Nations people who embodied two spirits (male and female). Encompasses individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.

V

Vaginal vault: Term used to describe the vagina after a hysterectomy when no cervix remains.

Vaginal atrophy: Often a symptom of menopause. The drying and thinning of the tissues of the vagina and urethra. This can lead to dyspareunia (pain during sexual intercourse) as well as vaginitis, cystitis, and urinary tract infections.

Vaginitis: Inflammation of the vaginal mucosa.

Vesicle: Small elevation of the skin containing serous fluid (e.g. blister).

Virus: A tiny organism that invades and grows in cells and thereby alters their function. Viruses cause a variety of infectious diseases and may also induce some types of cancer.

References

¹ This section adapted from Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) (2004), Alberta Cervical Cancer Screening Program (2002), Faculty of Primary Care Nurse Practitioner Program, Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (2000), Cancer Research Link (2002) & Cervical Screening Initiatives Program of Newfoundland and Labrador (2001).