Surgical procedures used to prevent cervical cancer do not affect fertility

By ACSH Staff — March 2, 2015

Each year, about three million women in the United States will have an suspicious or abnormal pap test, according to the CDC. Following the abnormal results, women often undergo diagnostic testing a colposcopy or biopsy and if precancerous lesions are found on the cervix, they may undergo surgical procedures. A new study [1] found that surgical procedures used to diagnose and treat these precancerous lesions do not reduce a woman's chance of becoming pregnant.

The researchers, led by Dr. Allison Naleway, senior investigator at the Kaiser Permanente Center for Health Research, looked at the medical records of about 4,100 women ages 14 to 53 on the Kaiser Permanente Health Plan in Oregon and Washington who had had a diagnostic cervical procedure. Women were monitored for twelve years, or until they became pregnant. These women were compared to 81,000 women who did not have a cervical cancer treatment and almost 14,000 women who had a definitive procedure to treat the lesion, ie. excision.

Researchers found that 14 percent of those who had a procedure got pregnant over the twelve-year period, compared to 9 percent of the women who had not had any type of procedure and 11 percent of the women who had had a diagnostic procedure.

Dr. Naleway concludes [2]: This is great news for the millions of women who have one of these procedures, but still want to have a family. There was a fear that these procedures could weaken the cervix, and reduce fertility, but our study suggests that this is not the case."

Currently, researchers are looking at these same women to determine whether these procedures affect birth outcomes. Results are expected later this year.
ACSH’s Dr. Gilbert Ross says, The results of this study offer some comfort to the women who undergo these procedures every year. However, this study also brings up an opportunity to discuss the importance [3] of having youngsters of both genders vaccinated against HPV, a leading cause of cervical cancer. The HPV-linked cancers are unique in that they can be prevented by simple vaccinations there is no valid reason for parents to avoid them.

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