American Indian women develop and die from cervical cancer too often. There is something that you can do - have regular Pap tests and get follow-up care as recommended by your health care provider. You can also learn more about Pap tests, what Pap tests results tell you, and what causes abnormal Pap tests, and use condoms.

To Find Out More:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Web Site: http://www.cdc.gov/std/ hpv
Hotline: 1-800-458-5231

American Social Health Association
Web Site: http://www.asha std.org
Hotline: 1-800-783-9877

American Cancer Society
Web Site: http://www.cancer.org
Hotline: 1-800-ACS-2345

National Cancer Institute*
Web Site: http://www.cancer.gov
Hotline: 1-800-4-CANCER

Native American Cancer Research Corporation*
Web Site: http://natamcancer.org

Cherokee Women's Wellness Center
876 Acquoni Road
Cherokee, North Carolina 28719
Phone: (828) 497-8151

The mission of the Cherokee Women's Wellness Center is to provide quality health, wellness, and disease prevention services to eligible women* with emphasis on breast and cervical cancer screening and early detection.

*Women who are eligible for health care services at the Cherokee Indian Hospital.
What is cervical cancer?
Cervical cancer is cancer of the cervix, which is at the opening of the uterus or womb. Cervical cancer is not the same as "cancer of the womb." Cervical cancer does not usually make a woman feel ill, so she may not know she has it. This is why cervical cancer is called the "silent disease."

What is a Pap test?
The Pap test is done by a healthcare provider to check for cervical cancer in women. The Pap test does not test for other types of cancer. The Pap test is not the same as a pelvic examination. It is a test done during the pelvic exam. The healthcare provider takes a sample of cells from a woman's cervix. Then, the cells are sent to a lab to find out if they are normal, abnormal, or cancer. Abnormal cells are most often caused by HPV infection.

What is HPV?
HPV infects the genital area (vagina, anus, and penis) of both men and women. HPV is passed from one person to another during sexual contact. HPV is a very common sexually transmitted infection. There are 40 types of HPV that can infect the genital area. Some types can cause abnormal cells on the cervix and cervical cancer and other types can cause genital warts. HPV can be treated but not cured. Most women do not notice any signs of having HPV infection. The only way to know if you have HPV is to have an HPV test (most often done when a woman has an abnormal Pap test). There are currently no HPV tests for men.

How often should women have Pap tests?
By age 21, or within three years of starting to have sex, all women should have their first Pap test. How often also depends on whether the woman has had normal or abnormal results. How often also depends on a woman's age and the type of Pap test that she has. It is important for her to check with a healthcare provider to find out when a Pap test is needed and to ask any questions she has.

What do Pap test results mean?
Pap test results come back normal or abnormal. If a Pap test is normal, then, a woman does not have to do anything until her next Pap test as recommended by her healthcare provider. If a Pap test is abnormal, then a woman needs to follow up with her healthcare provider. Women can ask their healthcare providers if they have any questions about their Pap test results.

What happens next if the Pap test result is abnormal?
An abnormal result does not always mean that a woman has cervical cancer. An abnormal result can mean that some cells could become cancer in the future. If the results are mildly abnormal, your healthcare provider will recommend one of the following next steps: do another Pap test, or do an HPV test, or do a colposcopy. If the results are more than mildly abnormal, a colposcopy is most often the next step. A colposcopy is to look more closely at the cervix using a magnifying glass. Sometimes, the healthcare provider has to take a sample of cervical tissue (called a biopsy). The tissue will be sent to a lab to check for pre-cancer and cancer. The next steps depend on the result of the biopsy. Some women will need treatment, and some women may not. A woman can ask her healthcare provider if she has any questions.

What else can women do?
Having a Pap test is important. Women can also use condoms. Although women may get HPV even with a condom, using a condom greatly lowers the chance of getting HPV and cervical cancer. Women can also limit the number of sex partners. Lastly, women can keep their bodies healthy by not smoking, eating right, exercising, and managing stress. Having a healthy body can help women avoid getting sick.

Three things to remember
- HPV is a very common sexually transmitted infection that can cause abnormal cells on the cervix and cervical cancer.
- Cervical cancer is very rare among women overall in the United States, but American Indian women are more often affected.
- Women can prevent cervical cancer by having regular Pap tests as recommended, following up on abnormal Pap results, and using condoms.