

Cervical screening



Topics covered

- Cervical cancer and human papillomavirus (HPV)
- Why cervical screening is important
- Changes to the National Cervical Screening Program

Cervical cancer

- A tumour or growth of abnormal cells in the cervix
- One of the most preventable cancers
- Four out of five women who develop cervical cancer have either never screened or do not screen regularly
- Does not usually have symptoms
- Nearly all cervical cancers are caused by infection with human papillomavirus (HPV)

Human papillomavirus (HPV)

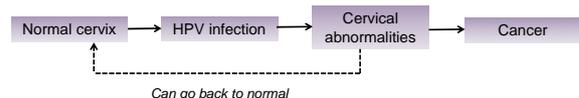
- Common infection in males and females
- Four out of five people will have HPV at some point in their lives
- Often no symptoms
- Usually cleared by the body's immune system within 1-2 years

HPV and the development of cervical cancer

- Genital HPV infection can cause changes in the cells of the cervix
- If the body does not clear the virus, these abnormal cell changes can progress to cervical cancer
- This usually takes a long time – about 10 to 15 years

Remember: most women who have HPV clear the virus and do not go on to develop cervical cancer

HPV and the development of cervical cancer



The importance of regular cervical screening

- Regular cervical screening finds abnormal cell changes caused by HPV early, allowing them to be monitored and if needed treated to prevent cancer
- Cervical cancer often has no symptoms

The National Cervical Screening Program (NCSP)

- Since the NCSP started back in 1991 the number of cases, and deaths from cervical cancer in Australia have more than halved
- Currently recommends all women aged between 18 and 69 years, who have ever been sexually active, to have a Pap smear every two years

Why the NCSP is changing

- New scientific knowledge on the development of cervical cancer
- New international and local evidence for cervical cancer prevention
- New technologies
- The introduction of the National HPV Vaccination Program in 2007

The renewed NCSP

- From 1 December 2017:
 - A five-yearly Cervical Screening Test will replace the two-yearly Pap smear
 - The screening age range will be 25 to 74 years
 - Self-collection may be an option for some women

Expected benefits

- The total number of tests in a woman's lifetime will now be 9 or 10, compared to 26 previously
- A further 30% reduction in the number of cases and deaths from cervical cancer

The new Cervical Screening Test

- The procedure for collecting a test sample is the same as for a Pap smear
- The laboratory will look for the presence of HPV. If HPV is found, the laboratory will use the same sample to look for the presence of any abnormal cells

Screening with a Cervical Screening Test every five years is more effective than, and just as safe as, screening with a Pap smear every two years

Test results

- Your healthcare provider will talk to you about your Cervical Screening Test results.
- Based on the results your healthcare provider may recommend you:
 - Return to screen in five years
 - Repeat the test in 12 months
 - See a specialist
 - Repeat the test in six weeks
- The NCSP will contact you and let you know when you are due for your next test

Self-collection

- Some women may be eligible to use a swab to collect a sample of cells from their vagina
- If HPV is not found in this sample, the woman will be due to screen again in 5 years.
- If HPV is found in this sample, the woman will either:
 - return to her healthcare provider for a sample to be collected from the cervix; or
 - be referred to a specialist

Summary of changes

	Current NCSP	Renewed NCSP (post 1 December 2017)
Age group	18-69 years	→ 25-74 years
Time between tests	Every 2 years	→ Every five years
Type of test	Pap smear	→ Cervical Screening Test
Self-collection offered?	No	→ Yes

Common questions

Is it safe to start cervical screening at age 25?

- Yes, because:
 - Screening has not decreased the number of cases or deaths from cervical cancer in this age group
 - Delaying screening until the age of 25 has been shown to be safe (and has been safely done in other countries)
 - Cervical cancer in young women is rare

Women of any age that experience symptoms, such as unusual bleeding or spotting, should see their healthcare provider immediately

Do I need to screen if I have had the HPV vaccine?

- Yes, because:
 - The HPV vaccine does not protect against all types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer

What about cervical cancers that are not caused by HPV?

- A very small percentage of cervical cancers are not caused by HPV
- These cancers are not well detected by any screening test

It is important that women who have symptoms see their healthcare provider immediately

When will I have my first Cervical Screening Test?

- Most women will be due for their first Cervical Screening Test two years after their last Pap smear
- Women who are currently undergoing monitoring or treatment should attend any follow-up that has been scheduled. It is important that these women speak with their healthcare provider about their individual situation

Key messages

- Regular cervical screening is your best protection against cervical cancer
- In December 2017 the National Cervical Screening Program will change, and women will be offered a Cervical Screening Test every five years
- For most women their first Cervical Screening Test will be due two years after their last Pap smear
- If you have any symptoms please see your healthcare provider immediately

Where to go for further information

- Contact your healthcare provider
- Visit healthywa.wa.gov.au/cervicalscreening
- Visit cancerscreening.gov.au